Contributions to INDIAN SOCIOLOGY



Contributions to Indian Sociology

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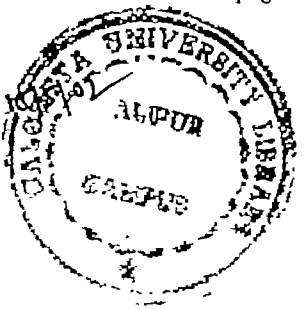
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Editorial note

With this 'new look' issue of *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (Volume 35, Number 1) we see some changes in the composition of the journal's Board of Editors. Professor Veena Das, who was Associate Editor from 1975 to 1991 and Editor from 1992, has expressed her desire to step down from the Editorship in view of her recent relocation at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. She will, however, continue her association as a member of the *CIS* Board of Editorial Advisers.

Professor Das's contribution to the production of the journal over the years has been outstanding. Apart from her own contributions and her involvement in editing two special issues (the most recent being *Tradition, pluralism and identity* [1998], for which she had written a lively introduction), she has also been instrumental in encouraging students and young researchers to submit their papers for publication. While we will miss her presence here in Delhi, we are glad that we can continue to draw on her advice and suggestions in her new capacity.

We also welcome to our Board of Editorial Advisers Professors André Béteille, Jan Breman, Jayant Lele and Michael Roberts. Dr. Nandini Sundar of the Institute of Economic Growth, who has been assisting with the production of the journal through the last year, now joins the editorial board as Editorial Associate.

Editors

Professor M.N. Srinivas Memorial Prize

The Indian Sociological Society and the Indian Council of Social Science Research have jointly set up the Professor M.N. Srinivas Endowment Fund. This Fund has instituted a prize for young sociologists/social anthropologists for publishing the best sociological/social anthropological paper in any of the social science journals, in English, in India. The prize will carry a sum of Rs. 1,000.

Papers published during 1 January 1998–31 December 2000 are eligible for consideration. The author must be 35 years or less in age on 31 December 2000. A reprint of the paper along with a photocopy of the title page of the journal must reach the office of Indian Sociological Society (Institute of Social Sciences, 8 Nelson Mandela Road, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110 070) on or before 31 October 2001. Besides the authors, others are also welcome to bring suitable papers to the notice of the selection committee for consideration.

A Uniform Customary Code? Marital breakdown and women's economic entitlements in rural Bijnor

Patricia Jeffery

Drawing on research in rural Bijnor district, western Uttar Pradesh, this article explores some of the implications of the Shah Bano controversy in the mid-1980s, and of the associated communalisation of politics, for local-level communal and gender politics. It makes three main points. First, the crucial parallels in the domestic lives of Hindu and Muslim women in rural Bijnor undermine Hindu Right assertions that Muslim women are uniquely oppressed, for instance, in relation to marital breakdown. Second, while political developments on the national stage have been highly significant in terms of local-level communal politics in Bijnor, the Muslim Women Act appears to have had no impact on the economic situations of rural Muslim women. Third and following from the first two points, bringing local-level gender politics into the frame alongside the communalisation of politics raises questions about strategic priorities in the struggle for gender equity in India.

Drawing on research in rural Bijnor district, this article focuses on aspects of everyday gender politics in western Uttar Pradesh (UP). In particular, exploring marital breakdown enables me to raise questions

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Acknowledgements: The research on which this article is based has been done with Roger Jeffery and I am grateful to him for comments on this article. Our thanks go to all the people in Bijnor who were so generous with their time; to our research assistants (Swaleha Begum, Radha Rani Sharma, Savita Pandey, Chhaya Pandey, Zarin Ahmed and Swatantra Tyagi); to colleagues in Edinburgh, Kuala Lumpur, Amsterdam, Oxford and Prague; and to Jens Lerche for comments on earlier versions of this article. We are grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), the Moray Fund of the University of Edinburgh and the Overseas Development Administration (UK) for research funding; none of these organisations is responsible for the opinions expressed here.

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about the relationship between formal law and theology on the one hand and the lived realities of Muslim and Hindu women on the other, about the efficacy of the law in protecting women's rights, and about strategic priorities in the struggle for gender equity in India—all issues that are raised by the Shah Bano controversy.

I
The Shah Bano case

Among the many activities initiated during the British colonial era were the classification of the Indian population on the basis of religious allegiance and the codification of indigenous legal systems and customary means of dispute settlement.[1] These included procedures for dealing with family life—such as marriage and marital breakdown, child custody, and property transfers within the family. Recent commentaries note that written texts were privileged over oral traditions, and encoding the 'correct' legal framework entailed attempts to homogenise the diversity of 'customary practices'. Crucially, British civil servants consulting (male) religious experts assumed that family life was governed by religious texts. Thus, distinctive systems of 'personal law' were codified, despite considerable evidence of cultural parallels and religious syncretism. Further, official policy was that family life should normally be regulated by the authorities of the different religious communities.[2] After 1947, the Hindu Code was revised, despite opposition (Agnes 1995; Kapur and Cossman 1996; Kishwar 1994; Parashar 1992), but Indian Muslims are still (notionally) governed by the Shariat Law of 1937.[3] Thus, the multiplicity of 'personal laws' remains, enshrining

[1] The British also codified vocabularies and grammars of local languages, systematised place names and engaged in extensive geographical and geological surveys. For more on this, see, for example, Appadurai (1993), Cohn (1987), Ludden (1993), Pandey (1990).

[2] The state's non-involvement in the 'private sphere' was (and still is) notional, of course. Prior to 1947, several instances of state involvement generated widespread debate and opposition: on *sati* (widow immolation) and the age of consent, see Parashar (1992: 17–76), Sangari (1995), Sarkar (1993).

[3] In Pakistan, by contrast, revised legislation passed in 1961 as the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance attempted to enhance the legal rights of Muslim women by reducing some of the most overtly discriminatory provisions of the 1937 Shariat legislation. Implementation and enforcement have, however, remained partial at best. see, for instance, Chipp-Kraushaar (1981) and Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987: 57–59). At the time of writing, the Ordinance is the subject of legal challenge from conservatives (as it has been periodically since 1961), which is being counter-challenged by feminist organisations (Women's Feature Service 1999).

religious or communal divisions through differing procedures, rights and obligations for Indian citizens of different religions.

The British rulers also developed systems of civil and criminal law applicable irrespective of religious allegiance, including the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). The Indian government's 1973 revisions of Section 125 of the CrPC enabled a woman who became homeless (for instance, after divorce or after being ousted from a son's house) to press for maintenance from her ex-husband or her son. How, though, should Muslim personal law and the CrPC come into play in relation to the rights of divorced Muslim women?

After being divorced, Shah Bano, an elderly Muslim woman from Indore (in Madhya Pradesh), appealed through the provisions of CrPC Section 125 for maintenance from her ex-husband.[4] He contested the case, claiming that it would be un-Islamic for a Muslim man to provide for his wife beyond the *'iddat* period. After the case was adjudicated by the Supreme Court in Delhi in 1985, conservative Muslims argued that the (Hindu) Supreme Court judges had neither the competence nor the jurisdiction to find in Shah Bano's favour or to make adverse comments about women's position in Islam. Indeed, during this outcry, Shah Bano felt compelled to dissociate herself from the judgement because she came to believe that it was contrary to Islamic law (Engineer 1987: 211–12). Rajiv Gandhi's Congress government permitted an independent member of parliament to introduce the somewhat curiously titled Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, which became law in 1986. Under its provisions, it seems that Muslim *men* were protected from maintenance claims by ex-wives because Muslim *women* could no longer make claims under CrPC Section 125.[5]

[4] The following provide useful accounts of the case. Chhachhi (1991), Engineer (1987), Z. Hasan (1989, 1993, 1994, 1999), Kishwar (1986), Kumar (1993: 169–71), Mody (1987), Palriwala and Agnihotri (1996: 511–19), Pathak and Rajan (1989).

[5] Certainly, the most widespread interpretation was that Muslim women's rights were being undermined. There is some ambiguity, however, because the Act's requirement that a Muslim man provide his ex-wife with fair and reasonable provision gave space for some legal decisions in which Muslim women obtained sizeable lump sum payments. In West Bengal, for instance, Mukhopadhyay (1994) reports that some women obtained legal aid and some successfully claimed maintenance through the Criminal Procedure Code. After the Muslim Women Bill was enacted, Muslim men facing claims from their ex-wives made counter-claims that they were under no obligation to pay maintenance. Engineer (1999) reports a case in Mumbai in which the judges used the Muslim Women Act to argue for long-term maintenance for a divorced Muslim woman. In response to outcomes such as these, Syed Shahabuddin introduced a private member's bill to the Lok Sabha to prevent this (Agnes 1996).

Responses to the Bill became largely framed by Congress and conservative Muslim rhetoric emphasising the constitutional protection of minority rights to govern their own domestic lives free from state interference and in accord with the (supposed) requirements of their religious beliefs. In opposing the Bill, the Hindu Right[6] also focused on minority rights, but to accuse Congress of cynically refusing to intervene in Muslim family law in order to retain the 'Muslim vote bank',[7] and of 'appeasing' Muslims by according them more rights than the majority Hindu population (for instance, by letting Muslim men evade the obligations entailed under CrPC 125); the conservative Muslim stance was viewed as confirmation that Muslim men victimise their womenfolk and that Islam is inherently oppressive to women (in contrast to Hindu men and the Hindu tradition). Soon, this was explicitly linked to the Hindu Right's increasingly assertive proclamations over the Babari Masjid in Ayodhya and to the wider communalisation of politics, marked by Muslim vulnerability to physical and rhetorical attacks from the Hindu Right and by the electoral successes of the BJP in the 1990s. In terms of subsequent political developments, then, a minority rights and communal politics reading of the Shah Bano case clearly has considerable justification.[8]

Yet the Shah Bano case was certainly not simply about minority rights and communal politics. At its core are crucial issues of women's economic entitlements. Liberal Muslims opposing the Muslim Women Bill asserted that generosity to ex-wives would not be contrary to the spirit of Islam or signify that Islam was endangered. Various feminist organisations not only opposed the Bill because it disadvantaged Muslim women vis-à-vis other Indian women, but attacked the negative comments about Islam in the Supreme Court judgement and highlighted the paltry sums normally awarded in maintenance: Shah Bano herself was

[6] The 'Hindu Right' comprises several organisations also known as the 'Sangh Parivar' or family of the Sangh, the Rashtra Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS or National Volunteer Corps), including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

[7] The notion of a somewhat mythical 'vote bank' revolves around the assumption that groups of people, such as Muslims, vote en bloc in local and national elections because their leaders can deliver their followers' votes. Indian Muslims tended to vote for Congress until the late 1980s, but sizeable numbers also voted for parties championing the interests of the urban working classes and the rural dispossessed, especially in recent years.

[8] For discussions of the Ayodhya affair and the communalisation of politics, see A. Basu and Kohli (1998), T. Basu et al. (1993), Chakravarti et al. (1992), Engineer (1991), Gopal (1991), M. Hasan (1997), Jaffrelot (1996), Luddden (1996), van der Veer (1994), Vanaik (1997).

granted just Rs. 179.20 per month by the Supreme Court after a lower court had originally granted her Rs. 25. Feminists also contested Hindu Right claims that Muslim women were especially disadvantaged and that the position of Hindu women was unproblematic, and they argued that the furore distracted attention from the inability of Indian women in general to ensure their financial security outside marriage. Such voices, however, became increasingly marginalised in the unfolding debate and by the Hindu Right's interventions.

Gender equity is enshrined in the Indian constitution—but so too is the freedom to practise religion. During the 1980s, the Indian government was swayed in turn by the contradictory demands of Muslim conservatives and the Hindu Right, for whom women were a crucial part of the terrain on which battles about minority rights and national identity were fought.[9] As the Shah Bano case demonstrated, religious freedom may be privileged over gender equity when the two conflict: 'community' self-regulation on matters covered by personal laws is a core element of religious freedom, yet the protection of religious freedom can have an extremely detrimental impact on women's rights (P. Jeffery 1999; Kapur and Cossman 1995).

Accounts of the Shah Bano case, however, are dominated by a focus on high-profile political, legal and constitutional issues. Little attention has been paid to the implications of the case and of the associated communalisation of politics for communal and gender politics at the grassroots, my central concerns here. I want to make three main points in this article. First, the crucial parallels in the everyday domestic lives of Hindu and Muslim women in rural Bijnor, combined with case material on marital breakdown, challenge Hindu Right assertions that Muslim women are uniquely oppressed by their menfolk and victimised by Islam. Second, the Shah Bano case and the Babari Masjid campaign were highly significant in terms of local-level communal politics in Bijnor (A. Basu 1995b; R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery 1994, 1997). Yet, the Muslim Women Act appears to have had no impact on the economic

[9] Literature on this topic addresses how women are iconised in relation to the nation or the community, the role of women activists in the Hindu Right, and how organisations of politicised religion advocate conventional family roles for women, argue for the importance of personal law in 'defining' community, and use gendered stereotypes in communal politics: see Bacchetta (1993, 1994, 1996), A. Basu (1993, 1995a, 1999), Z. Hasan (1989, 1993, 1994, 1999), Jeffery and Basu (1999), Kandiyoti (1991), Sarkar (1991), Sarkar and Butalia (1995). The complex interplay between gender and national or ethnic identities is an issue not only in India but more generally. See, for instance, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), Moghadam (1994a, 1994b), Yuval-Davis (1997).

situations of ordinary Muslim women. Third and following from the first two points, bringing local-level gender politics into the frame alongside the communalisation of politics exposes dilemmas for feminist activism in regard to mobilising rural women around issues of gender equity.

II
Community and gender in rural Bijnor

About a quarter of Indian Muslims live in UP, where they numbered over twenty-four million (or 17.33 per cent of the state's total population) in 1991 (Registrar General and Census Commissioner 1996: Table C-9). Almost two thirds live in the rural areas, compared with the overall UP figure of just over 80 per cent. Muslims are under-represented among the most wealthy sectors: town-dwellers tend to inhabit particular residential areas and are especially associated with artisanal activities such as weaving and metal work; rural Muslims are generally middle or poor peasants, landless agricultural labourers or semi-skilled labourers (mechanics, weavers, etc.). When class is held constant, the similar domestic arrangements, property rights, linguistic patterns and diet of north Indian Muslims and Hindus, and the distinctively South Asian flavour to Islam, are striking, despite the divisions connected with the aftermath of Partition and the recent communalisation of politics (Ahmad 1973, 1976, 1981; M. Hasan 1991, 1997; Mann 1992).

Bijnor district in western UP seems less affluent than districts to the west which have had canal irrigation since the end of the 19th century, but on most criteria of social and economic development it is rather more 'developed' than eastern UP. At about 32 per cent of the total rural population, the rural Muslim population in Bijnor district is proportionately one of the highest in UP.[10] Broadly speaking, kinship and marriage, residence and property ownership, gender politics and demography among rural Muslims and Hindus alike reflect what Dyson and Moore have called the 'northern demographic regime' (Dyson and

[10] Since 1982, Roger Jeffery and I have been working in rural Bijnor, in two Hindu-dominated villages, Dharmnagri and Nangal (populations about 750 and 4,000), and two Muslim-dominated villages, Jhakri and Qaziwala (populations about 350 and 3,000). For more details on Bijnor's economy, demography and social organisation, see P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery (1996a), P. Jeffery et al. (1989), R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery (1997). For other accounts of villages of the western UP plains, see Raheja (1988, 1995), Raheja and Gold (1994), Wadley (1994). For northern India more generally, see also Chowdhry (1994), Mandelbaum (1986, 1988), Sharma (1980).

Moore 1983). The following paragraphs sketch the position of young married women, for whom marital breakdown by separation or divorce is most salient.

As is usual throughout the region, productive resources, especially land, are owned (albeit inequitably) and managed by men. Women—whether as daughters or as wives—scarcely ever own land, irrespective of community or social class (Agarwal 1994). A girl normally depends on her father and brothers to meet the costs of raising her and of arranging her marriage. At all levels of the class hierarchy, the most honourable form of marriage requires the bride's parents and their wider kin network to provide a dowry. This can entail major outlays for clothing and jewellery for the bride and for members of her husband's family, household goods—bed, bedding, cooking utensils, etc.—and, among Hindus, cash.[11] On marriage, the bride normally migrates to her husband's village. If the mother-in-law is alive, the new bride can expect to spend some years sharing a cooking hearth, subject not only to her husband's controls but also to those of his mother.

It is crucial that a woman bears children, yet the physiological processes associated with fertility and childbearing (sexual intercourse, menstruation, pregnancy, birthing and post-partum bleeding) are matters of shame (*sharm kī bāt*) and/or of pollution (locally termed *gandagī*). Moreover, Muslims and Hindus alike readily express a preference for sons over daughters, largely grounding their views on parental anxieties about providing dowries for daughters and on the importance of having sons to ensure support in old age. This part of UP—and northern South Asia in general—is notable for very masculine sex ratios, attributable to differential care of young boys and girls and to high rates of maternal mortality.

While a young married woman's work may be trivialised by her in-laws (and even by herself), she plays an important economic role in the well-being of her husband's household, cooking, child-rearing, caring for livestock or working in the family fields. Variations in women's work relate to the class position of their husband's household, whether Hindu or Muslim, as well as to life-cycle changes. In the wealthiest households, controls over women's mobility beyond domestic space are evidenced in seclusion practices known locally as *pardā*; women will work almost wholly in and around the home. Somewhat poorer households may

[11] Parents cannot always achieve this ideal, and those who fail to save for their daughters' marriages are subject to widespread censure or pity. I am leaving dowry escalation and dowry harassment to one side here

endeavour to keep their womenfolk engaged in activities based around the home, generally unpaid work for the household, although some women earn small sums of money by spinning cotton thread or stitching clothes for neighbours. Women in the poorest households may be compelled to seek employment as domestic servants or field labourers for the richer households. Poor, and usually elderly, widows (or women with husbands who earn insufficiently) may practise as *dāīs* (traditional birth attendants), a low status occupation associated with pollution (R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery 1993a). Most rural women are not well placed to support themselves: very few have the schooling or training that could enable them to earn enough to become economically independent.[12]

Marriage migration has important social consequences for married women. Unlike her husband, a young married woman generally has little 'social capital', because she is separated from the networks of kin and friends she established during childhood. Nevertheless, her parents and brothers continue to be concerned for her. Partly, this is reflected in the things they continue to present to her. Indeed, Hindu and Muslim women describe their 'income' (*āmdanī*) as the foodstuffs (grain, sugar products), jewellery, clothing and cash (and very occasionally livestock) sent by their natal kin after the rice and wheat harvests, at festivals (e.g., Eid for Muslims, Holi for Hindus), when they give birth, when their children are married, and when there are marriages and births in their natal household. Usually, however, such gifts are neither regular not sufficient to furnish all their requirements and provide them with a route to economic independence. Indeed, women whose parents and brothers are financially straitened may receive little or no such 'income'.

Some features of domestic life suggest that many Muslim women may be somewhat better placed than the typical Hindu woman in rural Bijnor. While son preferences are expressed irrespective of religious community, maternity history and census data from the study villages indicated that sex ratios are markedly less masculine among Muslims than among Hindus (R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery 1997: 68, 230–35).[13]

[12] According to the 1991 Census of India, the rural literacy rate in Bijnor for females aged 7 and above was 22.5 per cent (the urban rate was 38 per cent) (Registrar General and Census Commissioner 1993: Table 7)

[13] We would also note, however, that Muslim women generally experience somewhat higher levels of fertility and child deaths (though not necessarily higher than low caste and poor Hindu women), largely due to their concentration in the lower levels of the economic hierarchy and their position as an ethnic minority (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1999; R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery 1997).

Among Muslims, dowry demands and dowry harassment of young married women, the fear of which plagues Hindus, are very rare and Muslim dowries do not include cash, unlike those among Hindus. Hindus arrange their children's marriages beyond the village and usually at some distance (25–30 km was common); women are usually married into households where they know no one, and only rarely are two closely related women married into the same village. Muslims generally arrange their children's marriages within a smaller geographical radius (about 3 km or less, and even within the village) and/or with people who are already closely related. This does not guarantee a woman's well-being after marriage, but Muslim women are normally less cut off from their natal kin than Hindu women. Married Hindu women normally receive visits from their brothers; many are never visited by parents (particularly the mother); and they rely on their husband or brothers to accompany them to their natal village for visits. Many married Muslim women can walk to their natal village—maybe with their children or with another married woman—and it is not uncommon for even their mothers to make the reverse trip. Dense marriage networks enable a Muslim woman's parents to have considerable information about a potential groom and his close relatives before agreeing to a marriage, and to exert pressure if their married daughter is mistreated, although many Muslim women see this as a rather ambiguous benefit because parents cannot easily be spared knowledge of their marital troubles.[14]

Basically, though, a married woman—whether Muslim or Hindu—is the responsibility of her husband and his kin, who should continue to provide for her throughout her life, meeting her daily living expenses for food, clothing, medical care and so forth. A young married woman is very unlikely to own productive resources or have an income that permits economic independence. She continues to obtain some social and economic support from her natal kin, but is basically dependent on her husband and his kin. Young married women's room for self-determination in their affinal village is severely circumscribed by their lack of economic and social power in their own right (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 1–37). Close marriage and lower dowry do not add up to greater autonomy for Muslim women, but probably do make the negotiation of dependency somewhat easier for them. Few Hindu or Muslim women in rural Bijnor, however, regard their dependency as problematic and many fear the 'responsibility' (*zimmedārī*) that independence (*āzādī*) would

[14] I discuss *mahr* below, in the context of marital breakdown.

entail (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1994, 1996b; R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery 1993b). The limitations of women's dependency, however, are starkly exposed by marital breakdown.

III
Marital breakdown

Conversations with women in rural Bijnor suggest that marital bliss is somewhat elusive. Women often resent how they are treated by their husbands, their mothers-in-law and other in-laws. Many women complain that they cannot visit their parents as often as they wish, that they are required to work extremely hard and yet their efforts are inadequately appreciated, or that marital violence is commonplace.

Nevertheless, few marriages end in separation.[15] Most separations occur in the first few years of a marriage, when there are few, if any, children. Beyond that, though, it is impossible even to hazard rates of marital breakdown. It is a 'shameful matter' (*sharm kī bāt*), and we often learnt of separations or marital difficulties by chance, when querying gaps in women's maternity histories, when old marital conflicts became part of people's weaponry in contemporary disputes, or when young women returned to their natal village and became the focus of gossip. Our most detailed data relate to the eighty-eight key informant couples.[16] Among them, about 6 per cent of the key informant women had experienced

[15] The term 'separation' covers cases of marital breakdown, including the minority of formal divorces. I leave widowhood on one side here as the antecedents and consequences are normally somewhat different from separation/divorce. Widowhood does not necessarily reflect acrimony between husband and wife (and possibly wider kin); a young widow may remain in her husband's village (and possibly be married leviratically to her husband's brother) or return to her natal kin, who may remarry her or permit her to remain with them as a widow. Widowhood, though, is more commonly experienced by older women, who will probably remain in their husband's village and expect to be supported by their adult sons. For more on widowhood, see Chen (1998), Chen and Drèze (1992, 1995a, 1995b), Chowdhry (1994: 74–120, 356–77), P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery (1996a: 231–73), Kolenda (1987a, 1987b: 288–354), Vatuk (1990, 1995), Wadley (1994. 25–29, 154–62, 1995a, 1995b).

[16] In 1982–83 (with follow-ups in 1985 and 1990), we concentrated on Dharmnagri and Jhakri and selected key informant couples from a range of class and caste positions, in which the wife had recently given birth or was pregnant; in 1990 we added Nangal and Qaziwala and selected additional key informant couples with the wife aged between 25 and 35 and who covered a range of educational experiences and marriage distances. There are almost equal numbers of Muslim and Hindu key informant couples. Among the key informants, four women and eight men had experienced widowhood by 1991. For more details see P. Jeffery et al. (1989: 233–37), R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery (1997. 32–34).

separation: one Muslim woman and three Hindu women were in second (or later) marriages and another Muslim woman had been 'divorced' by her husband but had returned to live with him (see P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery [1996a: 142–54] for more details of her case). This figure cannot be extended to the populations as a whole, of course; nor can these cases give a reliable indication of which spouse is more likely to initiate the separation or of differential rates of marital breakdown, say by economic position or community.

While these cases and the others we learnt about vary in their specifics, there are some common features, whether they occurred before or after the Shah Bano case. Formal divorce procedures are hardly ever deployed: few people take marital disputes to secular law courts and Muslim couples are unlikely to take their case to a *qāzī*. Rather, informal kin- and village-based mechanisms are central, both in trying to prevent marital breakdown and in dealing with it once it happens. These 'customary' and taken-for-granted procedures may not relate closely to stipulations laid out in theological treatises or in the statute books of the Indian state, and focusing on how people customarily respond to marital problems and marriage breakdown demonstrates further important parallels between Muslims and Hindus in rural Bijnor.

Avoiding marital breakdown

Marital breakdown is far more than a 'shameful matter', and the economic as well as social prospects facing separated women help explain why women often devote considerable energy to avoiding it. Recent discussions emphasising the importance of disaggregating the household and of focusing on intra-household negotiation give some leverage here (Agarwal 1997; Kandiyoti 1988, 1998; Sen 1990). Sen views households as characterised by 'co-operative conflicts', because members have some interests in common and others that differ. Negotiations over conflicts reflect the parties' perceptions of their interests, contributions to the household and entitlements; the outcomes normally benefit those parties with the least to lose in the 'breakdown position' (when the household itself dissolves) because they have the greatest bargaining power. Similarly, Agarwal outlines the differential bargaining power and different 'exit options' of household members. Against Sen, though, she argues that women's failures to strike bargains seemingly in their interests should not be interpreted as acceptance of their situations, for there is evidence aplenty that South Asian women critique their situations. An 'overt appearance of compliance' is a 'survival strategy' (Agarwal 1997: 24) for women

who lack economic power (productive and other resources, independent income) and social capital (social support networks after marriage migration, socially sanctioned and gendered styles of bargaining that put men at an advantage) within the household and beyond. This is similar to Kandiyoti's view of the 'patriarchal bargains' struck when women weigh up the short- and long-term costs and benefits of complying with or resisting their situations. Gender inequalities change through an individual's lifetime, and the relatively powerless young married woman can anticipate a more powerful position as mother-in-law in later years—provided she toes the line meanwhile (Kandiyoti 1988).[17]

Men do not lightly or frequently oust their wives from the marital home. The labour intensity of work plus the gender division of labour mean that households need able-bodied adult women just as they need men. Men also need wives to bear sons to support them in old age. That said, a separated man does not lose his home or his land (if any) and he is not usually socially shunned in his natal village, unless he has a reputation for extreme violence or heavy drinking. A separated man can generally find a second spouse more readily than can a separated woman—although parents may be reluctant to marry their daughter to a man with a record of marital breakdown, and such men's second wives are generally widowed or separated women.[18]

These considerations apply to Muslim and Hindu men alike, yet a central element of Hindu Right anti-Muslim rhetoric is the 'triple *talāq*', which they allege means that Muslim wives are routinely being repudiated on a whim (by implication, in contrast to Hindu women).[19] Crucially for my argument, such communal contrasts are not supported by the Bijnor data. Few men of either community initiate a separation; when they do so, it is generally through informal means such as despatching

[17] Agarwal (1997) and Kandiyoti (1998) both address 'rationality' and the extent to which women understand the bases of their subordination or are submerged in false consciousness, but I do not have the space to discuss this further here

[18] To use the term 'marriage' for such second unions is somewhat problematic as they would rarely meet formal legal definitions of marriage, even though they are generally regarded as 'marriages' by local people. See below when I discuss second marriage from the woman's viewpoint

[19] Hindu Right discourse suggests that Muslim men are sexually rapacious and liable to replace their wives frequently and/or indulge in polygamous unions Polygamy is very uncommon in Bijnor, but is slightly more frequent among Hindus (for whom it is not legal) than among Muslims (for whom it is permitted). Polygamy is usually connected with the infertility of the first wife The 'victimised Muslim woman' discourse also includes claims about seclusion and lack of education, as well as the specific issues central to the Shah Bano case. See, for example, Bacchetta (1994).

the wife to her natal village or failing to collect her after a visit there. The triple *talāq* is simply not part of Muslim men's everyday repertoire, any more than secular law courts are a part of Hindu men's.

In rural Bijnor, however, a woman's exit options make marital separation even less attractive for her. Remaining in an uncongenial marriage often seems that least worst option when set against her likely fate as a separated woman. Several key informants and others—Hindu and Muslim alike—presented their marital problems as seemingly presenting no realistic option but to endure the difficulties. Take Anisa, for example.[20] After she was widowed, her parents wanted to safeguard her future, so they arranged her marriage to Ahmad. About four years later (in 1991), her situation was miserable, because her in-laws taunted her about her second marriage, beat her, refused to let her visit her parents and insulted her relatives if they visited her. How could she escape this situation? She had virtually no contact with her parents and had little prospect of rescue from that quarter:

> If I didn't think of the children, I'd just die. But then I realise there's no one who would care for my children. They'd end up running from one place to the next being beaten.... My first husband never even slapped me with his four fingers, but this one beats me daily.... On occasion, I've considered taking poison. But then I think about the children. Anyway, the villagers would say it was an unlawful death (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 255).

Generally, it is considered inappropriate for parents to become involved in their daughter's marital problems. Indeed, unhappily married women often say nothing to their parents, because they are ashamed or wish to protect their parents from knowing about troubles from which they should remain aloof, as Kavita's account illustrates. Since before her marriage in the late 1980s, Kavita's husband had been having an affair with his older brother's wife. In order to avoid trouble from the couple, Kavita had adopted a policy of silence—both in her in-laws' home and with her parents:

> The last time I visited my parents, my husband complained to them that I fight with him a lot. So my mother asked me why I fight with him. She told me to remain silent and not interfere with him whatever he might do. But how could I tell my parents about my husband's

[20] The pseudonyms here are the same as in P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery (1996a), P. Jeffery et al. (1989) and R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery (1997).

> affair and the beatings? I've never said a thing about it to my father when he visits me here. How could I tell him about such a wicked matter? I couldn't tell my mother either. Even if I got the courage to do so, my mother wouldn't be able to say anything to my father. So what would be the point? (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 230).

Parental interventions considered unwarranted or excessively frequent are roundly criticised and create annoyance among the daughter's in-laws. A married daughter is in 'her own' house and is expected to deal with her own difficulties. Nevertheless, parents often did become involved if they thought their daughter could not resolve or escape her marital problems without their support—a clear recognition of the young married woman's lack of social and economic power. For instance, when news came one evening in 1990 that Brijpal's daughter had taken rat poison after a dispute with her husband, Brijpal took a party of his young male relatives to threaten his son-in-law (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 192–96).

Sometimes a woman's parents make considerable efforts to achieve a reconciliation or to make it possible for their daughter to tolerate her lot. Shankar's sister, for instance, was married to a man who spent all his earnings on drink. Shankar and his two brothers provided her with money, grain after each harvest, and clothing so that she could remain in her in-laws' village with her children (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 190). Often, interventions were occasioned when a daughter visited her parents and refused to return to her husband's home until her in-laws had been confronted. A violent husband would be admonished and told that his wife would not return to his house until he mended his ways. A man whose father made unseemly advances or whose mother stirred up trouble—criticising his wife's work, demanding that she bring more goods from her parents, taunting her because she has failed to bear any sons—might be told that his wife would not return until he guaranteed good treatment in future.

It is not unusual for a young woman to live in her parents' home for several months while these negotiations and threats take their course: Afsana spent nine months in her parents' home in 1982. Zebunissa was in her parents' home for over a year throughout our fieldwork in 1990–91; Promilla reported staying in her parents' home for about a year in the mid-1970s, while Jayavati was back in her widowed mother's house for much of our 1990–91 fieldwork (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 159–60, 178–79, 197–99, 219–23). The husband and members of his close family may make several visits before the young woman is

returned to her marital home.[21] Occasionally, a prominent person from the woman's natal village may mediate: Kunwar Satya Vira in Dharmnagri has enabled several young women to stand firm in refusing to rejoin their husbands, as in the case of Sudesh's daughter (ibid.: 132–33). The pressure on a woman's in-laws may include threats of legal action, but they are rarely implemented: local people fear involvement in the legal process, even when their case is strong, because they believe the police and the judiciary to be corrupt.

Marital breakdown and women's economic vulnerability

When marriages break down, they generally do so before the wife has sons of an age to support her. Irrespective of who initiated the separation, the woman must leave the home she has shared with her husband: it is his home, not hers. She cannot even remain in her husband's village. Separated women do not obtain ownership or usufruct rights in their ex-husbands' land (or other property), any more than they have rights in the marital home; nor do they receive maintenance payments from their ex-husbands or in-laws. Few women have the education to enable them to enter the labour force on favourable terms.

Formally, Muslim women seem better placed than comparable Hindu women because of the *mahr* (the cash settlement by a Muslim man on his wife, specified in the marriage contract). Sometimes, the husband should give some or all of the *mahr* immediately. More commonly, the *mahr* is deferred and the husband is expected to give it only if he initiates divorce; the woman who initiates separation forfeits the *mahr*. In the event of divorce, the *mahr* notionally provides the separated woman with economic security. There is no parallel among Hindus, which is perhaps why *mahr* does not figure in the Hindu Right's anti-Muslim discourse.

Muslim women in rural Bijnor were, however, sceptical about the *mahr*.[22] Many saw little sense in claiming it while living with their husbands, since it would be spent on the food and clothing they were already receiving. Even if the *mahr* were given, moreover, it could not provide long-term economic independence. A quarter of the key informants did not know what their *mahr* was. Of those who did, just one

[21] If the problem is disputes with the husband's parents or brothers and their wives, both the daughter and her husband may live in the woman's natal village to preserve their relationship, e.g., Mamta and her daughter Rani (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 224–26).

[22] This part of the discussion is based on our discussions with our Muslim key informants as well as with many other Muslim men and women in rural Bijnor.

mentioned a *mahr* of Rs. 15,000, ten others mentioned sums between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 8,000, and five said their *mahr* was the '*mahr Fatimi*'[23] comprising 125 silver rupees. For the remaining third, the *mahr* was less than Rs. 500 (for more than half of them it was under Rs. 100, and several had a *mahr* of just Rs. 25). Several women said they had already consumed far more than their *mahr* was worth in their husbands' homes. Others said that their *mahr* was the focus of banter: Hashmi (whose *mahr* is Rs. 125) said, 'My husband laughs and says, "How much is the *mahr* anyway? I can give it whenever I wish!"' while Khurshida told us, 'My father-in-law teases my husband, saying, "Give Khurshida her Rs. 25—it's a very heavy *mahr*!"'

In any case, one third of the key informants (disproportionately, those with the highest *mahr*) had 'forgiven' or 'renounced' (*mo'āf karna*) the *mahr*, mostly under pressure from their husbands. For instance, when Zubeida was being married to her deceased older sister's husband, the proceedings were delayed for four days because of her stepfather's insistence that the *mahr* be Rs. 5,000, but Zubeida was forced to renounce the *mahr* later (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 111–12). Two women had forgiven the *mahr* voluntarily in order not to place their husbands in debt, while nearly a quarter could not recall if they had forgiven it or not. The general view was, 'But the *mahr* is only forgiven—who is giving it?' and 'The *mahr*? Who gives it? They all make you forgive it!' Not one woman had received her *mahr*, either when her marriage was consummated or later; as one woman put it, 'No one at all gives it. Enough! [*bas*!] There must be one or two men somewhere in the world who give it!'

Even after divorce, women claimed, the *mahr* is not given. Several said that people are now 'tying' their sons-in-law with a 'price tag' (*raqam*, meaning a large *mahr*) to prevent them from initiating divorce, particularly if the marriage is between non-kin, but they saw little point if wives are compelled to renounce the *mahr*. Others said divorced and separated women are unlikely to receive the *mahr*, even when they have not forgiven it: 'But what is the benefit of *mahr*? If a man is going to leave his wife, he'll do so, no matter how much *mahr* has been set.' The *mahr* was sometimes shrouded in uncertainty as well as cynicism:

> 'I forgave it on the first night. But I've heard that *mahr* forgiven on the first night is not understood to have been forgiven in law. If it is

[23] This is the *mahr* specified when Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammed, was married, it is sometimes called *sharia mahr*. Silver rupees are more valuable than contemporary coins of the same face value.

forgiven a few days after the wedding, then it is considered forgiven. I do not really know. But here in the village, who gives the *mahr*? They don't give the *mahr* even if they do give *talāq*!'[24]

In rural Bijnor, then, Muslim women are not protected from marital breakdown or from financial insecurity after it by the *mahr*. A separated woman could not live an independent life on the basis of the *mahr*—but none of the separated Muslim women we knew had received her *mahr* in any case. In practice, no woman—whether Muslim or Hindu—is likely to receive financial support from her ex-husband.[25]

In other parts of the world, where women's property rights, agricultural work or educational levels permit economic independence, women may establish female-headed households after separation (or widowhood) (Chant 1997). South Asia as a whole, however, seems to be characterised by an aversion to such households. The northern areas, in particular, are marked by low levels of female-headed households.[26] For women in rural Bijnor, separation usually entails returning to their natal kin, at least in the first instance.

Depending on the natal kin

A woman's natal kin will probably have been contributing to her material well-being already, but her dowry and the other items presented to her may no longer be accessible. Foodstuffs will have been eaten,

[24] It seems to be common for Muslim women not to receive their due according to Islamic law. Other accounts of contemporary practices with respect to *mahr* in India include Agarwal (1994: 227–28, 260), Agnes (1996), Ahmed-Ghosh (1994: 178–80), Engineer (1992: 111–13), Hussain (1976. 119–37, 193–94), Jacobson (1976· 185, 207, 1995: 187), Jeffery (2000a, 57–59), Mann (1992: 69, 1994:154–56), Papanek (1982: 24–25), Singh (1992: 81). For historical sources see Ali (1832: Vol. 1, 345), Blunt (1969: 198), Crooke (1921: 75), Kozlowski (1989), Metcalf (1992: 139–42).

[25] We can note the irony of conservative Muslim claims to orthodoxy over the issue of maintenance of ex-wives during the Shah Bano controversy, since Muslim women commonly do not receive financial entitlements over which there does not seem to be doctrinal dispute.

[26] For instance, older widows hope for support from their adult sons, while young widows will probably either be remarried (either leviratically in the deceased husband's village or in the natal village). Widows occasionally inherit land, but most do not. In relatively wealthy families with daughters but no sons, a female-headed household is averted by the 'in-living son-in-law' (*ghar jamāī*) who moves to his father-in-law's home and runs the farm. Typically, women who inherit land, either as widows or as daughters, cannot manage or cultivate their farms effectively: women cannot plough (although they do many other agricultural tasks) and their mobility beyond the home is limited. Thus, they normally rely on male kin.

cooking utensils may have been requisitioned by her mother-in-law. Clothing may have been worn out or presented to an affinal relative and jewellery sold to pay off a debt or buy medicines, or presented to her husband's sister. Cash may have gone on daily expenses or on large-scale expenditures, such as installing a tubewell or refurbishing her house. Sometimes, a woman's parents threaten reprisals, but there is generally little hope of retrieving even a small portion of the items they presented to her, even if they have not been consumed.

Further, the woman who visits her parents and tells them of her marital problems could not have carried enough with her—apart from her jewellery perhaps—to support her for more than a few days. Those, such as Dilruba, who feared that their marriage might collapse, might have persuaded their parents to store the foodstuffs and cash they presented rather than send it to them in their husbands' homes:

> For the past two years, I've been leaving the things at my mother's house so that I could buy my own necessities there.... Last Eid, for instance, I received 2 kg of sugar, 10 kg of unrefined sugar, 5 kg of rice, and 2 kg of flour. I just brought the sugar and left everything else at my mother's house. When he [Dilshad] divorced me and put me out of the house, I went to my mother's home. I sold some unrefined sugar and rice so that I could buy what I needed. Now I'm returning after six days, and my mother and my brother each gave me 10 kg of wheat. I've left it all in my mother's house. What could I do with it if I brought it here? (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 151)

A few women had stored jewellery in their parents' homes because they suspected their parents-in-law or husbands of having designs on it, but the woman whose husband fails to collect her from her parents' house is more likely to have nothing salted away. In any case, even Dilruba's forward-planning would not provide long-term economic independence. Basically, a separated woman, whether Muslim or Hindu, faces almost certain penury unless she can persuade her natal kin to support her. Certainly, they are generally the separated woman's best source of support, though not necessarily a very good one. Women whose marriages break down are often blamed for failing to adjust to their in-laws' requirements, for bringing shame on their natal families and for damaging the marriage prospects of their unmarried siblings, unless they can plausibly argue that the whole sorry affair resulted from their in-laws' evilness. Moreover, once a daughter has been provided with a dowry, she should not make further substantial claims on

her parents' property, and certainly not on her father's land (if any). Periodic outlays for gifts to her as a married woman are of a very different order—in quantity and in how they are perceived—from meeting the expenses of a separated woman living permanently in her natal village again. Food, clothing, medical expenses on a daily basis for her and any children who accompanied her, and possibly educating her children and arranging their marriages, would exceed her parents' and brothers' expectations of their financial obligations. She would be construed not simply as a financial burden, but as wrongfully consuming the entitlements of her brothers, their wives and their children. Her natal kin, then, may provide shelter and support only grudgingly and temporarily.

Dependency in another marriage

Even women acting decisively to end an unhappy marriage cannot ensure that they retain control over their destiny thereafter, for their natal kin generally make haste to place them in new 'marriages'. Among Hindus, these new unions do not involve full marriage rituals; among Muslims they may. Locally, though, the pair are usually regarded as married and their children are considered legitimate.[27] This outcome, however, does not necessarily offer attractive prospects for either party.

The preferred marriage for a man is with a previously unmarried woman whose natal kin provide her with a dowry. The separated woman cannot meet the former criterion—and her natal kin may not meet the latter one at all or to the extent that makes her an attractive match. Sometimes, natal kin put together a modest second dowry, but they are unlikely to have retrieved any items from the first one and they may be unable or unwilling to foot another substantial bill. Chet Ram was widowed in the mid-1980s; his second wife had been married to an impotent alcoholic and had spent three years in her natal village after refusing to return to him. A few months after she married Chet Ram, her parents presented him with Rs. 200, a watch and some cloth. (Chet Ram had presented her with no clothes or jewellery at the time of their marriage.) Of the separated key informants, however, she is the only one remarried like this; the separated (and sometimes also the widowed) woman is more likely to become a 'bought bride', when her

[27] By contrast, some widows had remained with their natal kin for many years without being pressured into remarriage.

new husband 'takes a bride for a price' (*bahū mol-lenā*), particularly if her brothers or another male go-between organise her second match. In the late 1970s, Taslim (in Jhakri) bought Tahira from his sister's husband who lived in Tahira's natal village. In Dharmnagri, Rohtash paid Rajballa's brothers Rs. 800 in the late 1970s, while Lalit had obtained seven wives in this fashion, including Lakshmi for whom he paid his cousin (MBS) Rs. 2,000 in about 1980 (P. Jeffery et al. 1989: 39–41; P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 231–44). In 1981 Muni left her violent husband and sheltered in the home of a cousin, whose husband sold her for Rs. 2,000 to her current husband in Nangal.

This is certainly not an approved method of marrying. Usually the man has been unable to arrange a conventional marriage, because he is widowed and already had children, or is considered too old by parents with young marriageable daughters, or because he was deserted by a first wife who accused him of mistreatment, or has some social or physical disability, or is extremely poor. The woman herself can expect little or no economic and social support from her natal kin. Bought brides come empty-handed (*khālī hāth*), without a dowry or the other gifts associated with the typical bride. They rarely visit their natal kin or receive visits from them, and are very poorly placed to protect themselves, whether from taunting neighbours or marital violence. Yet remarriage is the most likely outcome for the separated woman: in the four study villages, just three women had been separated for several years without being remarried.

It is hardly surprising that women and their natal kin strive so hard to prevent marital breakdowns. The social and economic prospects for separated women pale in comparison with an approved dowry marriage—perhaps even in the face of considerable discord. The similarity in Muslim and Hindu women's experiences of economic dependency in marriage and economic vulnerability after marital breakdown is a key point here. Contrary to Hindu Right assertions, Hindu women in rural Bijnor are not less vulnerable to being left in penury by their husbands than Muslim women are. The types of problems women report, the efforts they put into achieving reconciliation, their reliance on natal kin and the centrality of kin-based mechanisms for dispute resolution, are common across the board. So, too, are the outcomes when the marriage breaks down: women's lack of entitlements in the ex-husband's household, their temporary reliance on their natal kin, and their probable remarriage in circumstances that may prove no better (and may even be worse) than the first marriage.

IV
Legal reform and gender politics at the local level

Adherents of organisations such as Tablighi Jama'at work to expunge 'cultural' and 'religious' syncretism from Muslim practice in South Asia (Gardner 1999; Metcalf 1999). On the other hand, the loyalty of Indian Muslims to the Indian nation has often been questioned by the Hindu Right, whose rhetoric is replete with contrasting stereotypes of Hindu and Muslim (Bacchetta 1993, 1994; Basu 1995a; M. Hasan 1988). In rural Bijnor, ethnic differences are indeed signalled in numerous ways (such as dress styles, aspects of religious belief and practice, stereotyping) (P. Jeffery 2000b). Yet, if we focus on micro-level everyday life, a bald proposition that Muslims and Hindus are inherently different flies in the face of social complexity. Identifications cross-cut one another in confusing and conflicting ways. People's behaviour—for instance, in regard to gender politics—cannot be neatly glossed as 'Muslim' or 'Hindu'. In other words, there are 'multiple patriarchies' cutting across the boundaries of reified religious communities (Sangari 1995).

Nevertheless, much of the discourse surrounding the Shah Bano affair—whether emanating from the Hindu Right, conservative Muslims or the state—played on assumptions that Muslims and Hindus are (or ought to be) essentially different. Moreover, the communalisation of contemporary Indian politics has had severe consequences for the attainment of gender justice. I shall touch on just two of the issues that arise here: the role of legal reform and how feminists can engage with the state; and the mobilisation of grassroots women around issues of gender equity.

In the early years after 1947, there was widespread optimism that the state would act to protect its citizens and that legislative reforms and government planning could achieve social justice, including for women. The disillusionment already in evidence by the late 1960s was exacerbated by the damning evidence of the gulf between women's constitutional rights and their daily lives, presented in the report of the National Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1974. Other events in the 1970s and 1980s—for instance, the notorious Mathura rape case—left many feminists deeply doubtful about the state's capacity to be an effective and reliable ally for women, not least because agents of the state—whether local policemen, national and state legislators or senior judges—have so often been implicated in actions inimical to women's interests. The stock-taking surrounding the

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fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence sparked further analysis among feminists about achievements and failures to date, as well as about strategic priorities in the light not just of communalised politics but also the economic developments of the 1990s, such as structural adjustment, economic liberalisation and consumerism (see Agnes 1995; Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995; Butalia 1997–98; Kapur and Cossman 1995, 1996: 232–83; Sangari 1995).

Throughout these debates, the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) has been a recurrent and contentious theme. The Report on the Status of Women in India had addressed the matter in the mid-1970s (National Committee on the Status of Women 1975: 57) and, until the Shah Bano case, the replacement of the separate systems of personal law by a single, gender-equitable UCC was a central demand of feminists in India. The Hindu Right, however, appropriated the idea of the UCC during the Shah Bano controversy, a move that seriously compromised feminist positions on legal reform. If feminists supported the UCC and opposed the Muslim Women Bill, they would risk being co-opted to the agendas of the Hindu Right and antagonising many Muslims by intervening in community affairs. Not to press for gender-equitable legislation pertaining to family matters, however, could leave unchallenged personal laws that are all premised on gender inequity. Not surprisingly, feminist activists in India remain divided over how to define the key issues and how to campaign for gender equity.

Can they tackle gender issues without marginalising other dimensions of inequality (caste, class, community)? Can they rely on reforms coming from within 'communities'? Should they concentrate on legal reforms and, if so, what form should these take? (Anveshi Law Committee 1997; Gangoli and Solanki 1997; Working Group on Women's Rights 1996). Should feminists focus on legal provisions within the framework of women's dependency in marriage, maybe pressing for larger maintenance payments (which are notoriously difficult to enforce), or for once-off rights in matrimonial property (which might be easier to enforce, but would not be relevant for women married to poor men)? (Agnes 1992; Parashar 1997).

Or does a focus on women's rights to maintenance perpetuate the presumption that women are (or should be) dependent on their husbands? Perhaps, indeed, the focus on the UCC falls into the trap of framing issues of gender equity solely in terms of women's position in the 'private' sphere of the family. Maybe the emphasis should be on enabling women to attain economic viability outside marriage that would be a

better long-term remedy for their disempowering dependency within marriage. The recent unearthing of the National Planning Committee's 1938 Report of the Sub-committee on Woman's Role in Planned Economy has highlighted how this (albeit contradictory) document contained not just recommendations for a UCC but also emphasised women's role as productive citizens whose work would both give them economic rights and benefit the nation (Banerjee 1998; Chaudhuri 1996; Kasturi 1996). Yet government policy since 1947 has largely been orientated to women as members of families, as mothers, and as family planning and welfare targets, not as individual citizens and workers. So, should feminist activism target state policies on employment and training?

Then again, beyond questions of which emphases are most appropriate in relation to government policy and legislation, are feminist activities best focused on the state, given its history of failures? Lest I be misunderstood, I am not advocating disengagement from the state. For one thing, it would leave *carte blanche* to pressure groups unlikely to have women's interests at heart. Further, at the very least, the law plays important symbolic and normative roles in stipulating what is permissible or intolerable, and so it is vital that the many gender (and other) inequities still enshrined in the legal system be removed. Yet it is also crucial to ask how much priority and energy should be focused on legislative reforms and on the state at the centre. Even when the framing of legislation apparently points towards the eradication of gender inequities, implementation that is itself gender-biased may undermine the legislation's intent and prevent women from ensuring that their legal rights are met in practice.

Marital breakdown in rural Bijnor is just one case in point. Prior to the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, Hindu and Muslim women alike had no customary right to maintenance after marital breakdown and they relied on support from their natal kin or from a new husband. None of the separated Muslim women we knew had received the *mahr* or received support from a *qāzī* to enforce their claims. Few women, whether Hindu or Muslim, could have afforded to employ lawyers and make maintenance claims under CrPC Section 125; after all, Shah Bano herself had exercised no control over funds, and she could pursue her claims in the courts only because of financial support from her adult sons. The CrPC Section 125 played a very limited role in preventing women from becoming destitute after marital breakdown. In practice, then, the Muslim Women Act's removal of Muslim women's rights to appeal through CrPC Section 125 had little direct negative

impact on the *economic* situation of Muslim women in rural Bijnor. Nor did the Act differentiate the economic positions of Hindu and Muslim women in practice (formally, though, it clearly did, and the wider impact of the affair on local communal politics should not be underestimated). Briefly, Muslim and Hindu women's economic insecurity in the event of marital breakdown has remained comparable.

In other words, what practical effects would a gender-equitable UCC—or indeed other legislation focusing on gender issues—have on most ordinary rural Indian women's experience of family life? Even in a situation of *formal* legal gender equality, there is no guarantee that *substantive* gender equality would result, without interventions in local-level social, economic and political processes beyond the legal domain, such as gender inequalities in access to property, income and entitlements in everyday practice. In rural Bijnor, there is already a (fairly) 'uniform customary code' with respect to gender politics at the domestic level, one that stacks the cards against women, especially young women. Many feminists would argue that empowering and mobilising women is the most effective remedy for this sort of issue (see, for instance, Molyneux 1998; Moser 1989).

Yet this will be difficult in rural Bijnor. For one thing, essentialised gender differences and the naturalisation of many aspects of everyday family life limit the critical reach of women's complaints. Women do not question the propriety of marriage migration, for instance, yet it seriously disempowers young married women in their husbands' households. The efforts people put into preventing marital breakdown reflect most women's lack of realistic options beyond dependency within the household. Few women are likely to mount far-reaching challenges to their best source of support and well-being—albeit not always a very good source, and one that is often felt to be a source of misery too. Further, within the household, women's interests do not coincide, and individual women's perspectives shift in the course of the life cycle. Moreover, women's lack of social capital in their affinal villages puts them in weak positions in the wider community, making it difficult for them either to mobilise or to withstand backlash (P. Jeffery 1999, 2000b; P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1996a: 1–37, 1999: 136–38). Women's resistance, then, is largely individualistic and sporadic 'everyday resistance' rather than organised activism (Scott 1985).

Crucially, here, the communalisation of Indian politics and people's heightened awareness of communal identities mean that mobilising women across the communal boundary would be no simple matter. The

impact of the Shah Bano case and the Babari Masjid campaign was felt locally, through communal violence, Muslim fears and Hindu assertiveness. During our research in 1990–91, many Hindu men cited the Shah Bano case as evidence of Hindu victimisation, of Muslim appeasement, and the justice of the Babari Masjid campaign. Indeed, Muslim women and men in Bijnor discussed the Shah Bano case in relation to communal politics, not the rights of Muslim women. In Bijnor town, women of the Durga Vahini (the women's organisation affiliated to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad) were crucial in the events that led up to the communal disturbances and curfew in October 1990 (Basu 1995b; R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery 1994, 1997). At the village level, Muslim and Hindu women and men engage in communal stereotyping and distancing (P. Jeffery 2000b), and gender and communal differences are marked in access to facilities provided by the local state, such as health care and schooling (P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery 1999). Women's allegiances around communal identities hamper the translation of their complaints about their everyday situations as women into activism across communal boundaries. In western UP there are few NGOs and even fewer women's groups that might facilitate women's mobilisation and empowerment (unlike in other parts of South Asia, perhaps most notably Bangladesh). Currently, too, the workings of local political parties, whether communal or not, provide little scope for optimism either (Omvedt 1993). Of course, this is not to foreclose the possibility that NGO activism, political parties, or indeed government-sponsored changes, might widen the opportunities for significant changes at some stage.

The Shah Bano case certainly had a momentous impact on India's recent political history: the constitutional dilemmas it raised are unresolved and the scars of communal disturbances remain. Yet the case has tended to divert attention away from the need to tackle gender politics at the grassroots, not just within the formal legal realm and by focusing on the state at the centre. Rights and obligations during marriage and after marital breakdown are not narrowly legal matters amenable to simple legal resolution. They are intensely political issues and customary procedures for dispute resolution reflect power imbalances at the micro-level. Crucially, most rural women in north India currently lack entitlements to economic resources and they are relatively powerless in the domestic arena and beyond. Without far-reaching changes at that level, women's formal legal rights are likely to remain a dead letter.

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Producing locality: Space, houses and public culture in a Hindu festival in Malaysia

Yeoh Seng Guan

Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and communitas have left an indelible mark on anthropological studies on ritual. Basically, Turner argued that there is a dialectic between the mediacy of social structure (characterised as a 'closed society' or 'status system') and the immediacy of communitas (an 'open society'). This article argues for a more fluid understanding of these kinds of social processes, drawing from Arjun Appadurai's characterisation of a 'locality' as a 'complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts'. This is illustrated through the ethnographic description and analysis of a local annual Hindu festival in an urban squatter settlement in Malaysia. While the mythic territoriality of the female deity primarily engenders symbolic boundary-making and life-sustaining activities, it also constitutes other layers of social spaces for organisers and participants alike. Individual and corporate agendas overlap and criss-cross one another. Local knowledge is both parochial and constituted within the wider religious, social and political landscapes. Altogether, these kinds of activities contribute towards a 'public culture' of Hinduism in Malaysia, characterised both by differentiation and the semblance of communitas.

In the anthropological study of religions, much has been made of the analytical distinction between 'textual' and 'popular' versions. For the former, sacred texts as well as mythological, philosophical and ritual

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elaborations of religions are the principal focus of study and elucidation. However, while various enduring themes in these texts certainly surface in the everyday lives of devotees, they do not necessarily accord with the degree of importance or coherence that priests and scholars may give to them. Thus, in examining 'popular Hinduism', ethnographic evidence rather than textual exegesis is the key methodological approach. By paying attention to the web of social relations and everyday practices, questions of human agency and cultural continuity/discontinuity come to the fore. As Chris Fuller succintly phrases it, in order to make for a meaningful world, 'textual Hinduism' is not passively received but involves activities of creation and recreation (Fuller 1992: 7).

In this article, I address two concerns related to the themes of social agency and meaning-making. The first entails ethnographically illustrating the manner in which the celebration of a local Hindu tutelary deity organised by a temple (*kovil*) situated within an urban squatter settlement contributes towards the production of locality. I draw from Arjun Appadurai's suggestion that a locality can be viewed as a 'complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts' (Appadurai 1995: 204). Making linkages not only involves an inscription of bodily knowledge and practices but also, as a social activity, entails the gathering, use and distribution of knowledge. 'Local knowledge', to cite Appadurai again, 'is substantially about producing reliably local subjects as well as about producing reliably local neighbourhoods within which such subjects can be recognised and organised' (ibid.: 206). In the ethnographic evidence offered, I explicate how this is played out in the context of an arena defined as an 'illegal' entity. The sociality of its residents is circumscribed by an array of images and constraints that do not arise for those living in legally recognised domiciles. Secondly, I expand on this theme by viewing everyday social practices as heuristic prisms that refract linkages between distinct sites and locations. Thus, although the local *kovil* of the settlement is an autonomous site that embodies parochial histories and memories, it is also not an entity that stands in isolation in the Hindu religious landscape. It is integrally linked to the social activities and self-representations of other *kovils* in the immediate locality, and beyond. Said differently, the activities and discourses in each site or setting are structured so that they are to some degree affected by experiences at other religious sites. In short, they contribute to a 'public culture' of Hinduism.

The manner in which these different trajectories intersect is elucidated through a discussion of the micropolitics of space as unfolded in the celebration of the annual goddess festival, the *thiruvila*. Although the *thiruvila* should be regarded as a temporal marker in a thread of Hindu special moments—a series of tempocosms—commemorated throughout a year, its centrality and significance is particularly evident in the large crowd of participants and spectators that attend this event. I do not, therefore, elaborate on a number of other ritual events—like the Thai Ponggal, Navarattiri, and an inaugural divine wedding ceremony—that were also organised and conducted at this *kovil*. In focusing on the *thiruvila*, I wish to suggest not only that this particular event allows for individual obligations, hopes and anxieties to be ritually addressed in the first instance, but also that its spatialised idioms are particularly apt for other signifying purposes as well, typifying the ambivalent position of working-class Indians in both the local and national ethnoscapes.

I

Kampung Mariyamman in transition

Kampung Mariyamman nestles within a sprawling cluster of 'squatter'[1] settlements on the fringes of Petaling Jaya,[2] a suburban township situated about 15 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. At the time of my fieldwork, the settlement comprised about 300 Indian households. Predominantly, the residents are of Tamil ancestry, but a much smaller population of Malayalis, Punjabis and Telegus are also found there. A large majority of the settlers are second or third generation South Indians, of low-ranking caste and working class, whose ancestors had been earlier drawn to British Malaya, beginning from the end of the 19th century. Subsequently, because of retrenchments or vying for better economic and social prospects, they had migrated from agricultural plantations and smaller towns elsewhere in

[1] In contesting the validity of forced evictions, the category 'squatter' has been put to question by a number of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It is contended that these residents should redesignate themselves as 'urban settlers' (*penerokа bandar*), thereby making a tactical link to Malay customary land practices prior to British legislative intervention which transformed land into a proprietary and marketable commodity.

[2] Petaling Jaya was conceived in the 1950s as a satellite town modelled after those in post-war Britain. Its creation has been attributed to General Gerald Templar, an influential figure tasked with tackling the Communist insurgency (the 'Emergency') between 1948 and 1960.

the country to the capital city. Most sought employment primarily in the lower rungs of the public and private sectors, as manual labourers, factory workers, peons, clerks, drivers and so forth. Others became self-employed as petty street traders, food hawkers and sub-contractors.

As in other squatter settlements in the country, Kampung Mariyamman's shadowy and organic-like existence and survival depend on a complex mix of individualised everyday bricolage and group ethnicised patronage. Elderly settlers remembered, for instance, that when they first arrived at the locality in the early 1960s there were only a few rows of modest and weathered dwelling barracks available. They were built for employees of tin mining companies which had worked the land for several decades, some as early as the beginning of the 20th century. As the prized mineral neared exhaustion, dredging activities gradually wound down leaving behind a stark, sandy terrain almost devoid of vegetation. Stagnant ponds and marshy grounds also dotted other parts of the landscape. The more habitable portions were quickly occupied by the earliest waves of settlers. But as space became severely congested, later settlers had to perch their housing structures precariously close to ravines and along the edges of a nearby river bank. Among elderly settlers, portrayals of the difficult past share various recurring themes. They remember the sweltering afternoons accentuated by the sandy soil and corrugated zinc roofing, the lack of shady vegetation, the frequency of flash floods during heavy thunderstorms, and the ubiquitous mosquitoes that plagued the settlements. Before communal standpipes were made available by the authorities, water for daily consumption was drawn from wells dug deep in the ground. At night, a combination of candles, kerosene lamps, and car batteries provided the chief sources of illumination. Later, they were supplemented by electricity generated from a diesel generator set up and owned by an enterprising settler. For a few hours each night, electricity was supplied for a fee. Subsequently, through the intervention of aspiring local-level political leaders, these sources gave way to mains electricity in return for electoral support. Similarly, the serpentine ribbons of earth tracks that wound their way through the settlements were eventually tarred under the auspices of political patronage.

Although the ethnic composition of migrants to the locality was in constant flux, Chinese and Malays dominated in the early years. However, during the ethnic clashes of 13 May 1969—mainly between the Chinese and the Malays—almost all of the Chinese settlers evacuated elsewhere. Their vacant places were quickly taken over by Indians who

had been displaced or had voluntarily migrated from rubber and oil palm plantations. Those who chose to settle in Kampung Mariyamman and other neighbouring settlements did so because of kin and friends who were there already, and also because of the employment opportunities offered by numerous factories located nearby. By the early 1970s, the settlement had grown so rapidly that elderly settlers claimed it was the single largest urban Indian colony in the country. But the *kampung* also quickly gained a reputation as a nest for criminals and drug addicts, and as a favoured site for territorial gang fights. Police raids to flush out these individuals became a regular feature of daily life. Settlers were uncomfortable with both sets of activities, as they involved harassment, danger and inconvenience. Other kinds of initiative offered by a number of religious and voluntary organisations elicited a more appreciative response from settlers. Near Kampung Mariyamman, a medical clinic, a kindergarten and a centre providing assistance for obtaining government documents like birth certificates and identity cards were set up and the services offered without charge. On certain days, clothing and selected food rations (like milk and rice) were distributed free. Additionally, communal activities like building drains, clearing rubbish and setting up credit cooperatives were conducted periodically. An attempt was also made by one of these organisations to have focused discussion groups on working conditions and workers' rights, especially for those employed in the neighbouring factories. Particularly for the first generation of settlers, without any strong support networks, these kinds of localised welfare aid were welcome.

Ethnic Malays, in comparison, were embedded in a more wide-ranging and top–down initiated network that had evolved from the early 1970s. The nature of *pembangunan* ('development') that was propelled under the auspices of the New Economic Policy (NEP) began to transform the Malaysian ethnoscape radically. An aspect of the 'plural society' as bequeathed by the British administration had essentially consisted of a discernible boundary between the traditional Malay royal courts and rural *kampung* on the one hand and, on the other, the new, predominantly non-Malay urban centres where private and public enterprises flourished. Under the sweeping and wide-ranging policies of the NEP, however, ethnic Malays were encouraged to 'modernise' by gravitating to the urban centres, dissolving the colonial legacy of a spatial ethnic divide. Preferential quotas in education, commercial and civil service opportunities, and an explicit industrialisation programme have been particularly instrumental in catalysing this rural–urban drift.

Many rural Malays resorted to 'self-help' housing or preferred to stay in existing squatter *kampungs* when they arrived in urban centres in an attempt to recreate the ambience of the countryside. In the city, an oasis in the shape of a *kampung* lifestyle was regarded as preferable to modern housing. Widespread squatting activities and the growing Malay ethnic make-up of urban squatters eventually attracted the attention and concern of administrators and planners. Apart from humanitarian considerations, concern that these places would become political breeding grounds for criminal as well as subversive and anti-nationalist sentiments became apparent in official disourse on the 'squatter problem'. By the late 1970s, in response to wide-ranging appeals for a more carefully thought out and long-term approach, a 'squatter policy' was explicitly spelled out. Its overall objective was to reduce the numbers of squatters by incremental resettlements as well as to contain their spatial expansion. Various policing mechanisms for monitoring and controlling squatter activities were adopted. Essentially, these policies upheld the legal rights of landowners over squatters, and the National Land Code was cited as incontrovertible evidence that squatting was a criminal activity.

In the vicinity of Kampung Mariyamman, these policy changes were manifested differentially. From the early 1980s onwards, local authorities initiated or approved projects to transform a section of the sprawling squatter settlements into a mix of residential and commercial development. Later, fortified by the buoyant Malaysian economy in the late 1980s and 1990s, these authorities also aspired to render Petaling Jaya township 'squatter-free' by the turn of the new century. Thousands of settlers were subsequently relocated to interim barrack-like accommodation—the *rumah panjang* ('longhouse')—as a sprawling *taman* (modern housing estate) consisting of low-cost dwellings took shape. A concomitant of this development observed by a number of settlers themselves was that the Indian component of the local population had progressively diminished through dispersal to other parts of the city. By the time of my fieldwork, the completed housing development had produced an arresting panorama. On one side of a long main road cutting the locality into two unequal halves lay an orderly, geometric grid of ornamented cement-brick houses (*rumah batu*) and wide service roads. Opposite, and presenting a mirror-like image to the *taman*, was a complicated maze of wooden squatter houses erected haphazardly and served by narrow ribbons of serpentine tracks.

II
The goddess Mariyamman

Mariyamman is one of an important category of 'village goddesses' (*gramadevata*) popularly worshipped in South India as well as in diasporic Indian communities around the world. In the South Indian religious landscape, virtually every local settlement has its own tutelary goddess whose powers are pre-eminently related to localised boundaries. Mythologically, Mariyamman is a fallen form or manifestation of Parvati, cursed by her husband Shiva to become a lower being due to an impure sexual thought on her part (Moffatt 1979: 248*f*). Generally, she is characterised as an exclusively jealous guardian of her domain, fiercely protective of her inhabitants vis-à-vis the territorial jurisdiction of other *gramadevatas*. At the same time, her motherly attributes allow her to be directly approached by ailing devotees. By accepting her *prasadam* (consecrated leavings), her worshippers express their equal subordination to the goddess, and receive the benefits of her equal protection over the territory they inhabit. But at the same time, these goddesses are translocal entities in so far as their names and characteristics are worshipped as tutelary deities in numerous other villages elsewhere. Thus, while there may be thousands of Mariyamman temples and shrines in the country, they can still be differentiated by locality, and are consequently regarded as distinct entities in their own right (Fuller 1992: 43; Good 1985: 119*f*).

'Village goddesses' are further viewed as largely ferocious and powerful divine beings, only marginally under the control of humans. Especially when standing alone and without a male consort, they are said to be susceptible to becoming 'hot', and much to be feared. During the hottest months between April and June, the goddesses' maleficent sides (their 'low forms') are associated with much-dreaded epidemic diseases. Mariyamman, for instance, is believed to inflict smallpox on the inhabitants of her domain either to announce her presence or because she is displeased with ritual negligence. Smallpox is indeed viewed as a direct intrusion of the goddess into the body of her victim, manifested in the form of feverish heat. Various measures are subsequently employed to 'cool down' the goddess and effect her withdrawal, for example the application of 'cooling' substances like water and *neem* (margosa) leaves to the victim and vicarious animal sacrifices (Fuller 1992: 83*ff*). The obverse side of the relationship, and the appropriate outcome of these ritual activities, is the bringing of rain, the continued fertility of

the land, good weather conditions for agriculture, and the general well-being of her inhabitants. The ambivalence of Mariyamman and other deities like her has been described as embodying the abstract forces that underlie certain particularly feared and intractable forms of human misfortune (Beck 1976; cf. Babb 1975). Indeed, it is her ambivalence and her 'irrationality' which heighten her effectiveness in attending to the chaotic and the unpredictable (Kinsley 1986: 209).

III
Kampung Mariyamman

In Kampung Mariyamman, the *kovil* is a modest-sized brick and wood structure built at the 'heart' of the settlement. The temple has none of the major distinguishing architectural features or sculptures found in large Sanskritic temples (for example, the *gopuram* or *mandapam*). Before the *kovil* was built about twenty-five years ago, a small shrine, which still stood during the period of my fieldwork,[3] was situated near the base of a *vata* (banyan) tree. Because of the scarcity of land in the settlement, all available spaces are fully utilised. Tucked to one side of the *kovil* is a small enclosed storeroom for ritual paraphernalia and, on the other side, a cage for coconuts and a shallow concrete water tank for ablutions. Furthermore, there are modifications to sacral geomantic requirements. In rural South India, Mariyamman and various 'village goddesses', given the ambivalent forms of their powers, are normally sited in the 'wilderness', that is, outside the village boundaries and to the north of inhabited social space. In Kampung Mariyamman, however, the *kovil* is surrounded by dwelling houses. Moreover, although Mariyamman should normally face the cardinal south, here—together with the other deities in the *kovil*—she has been reoriented to the east. The interior of the *kovil* is easily visible from the outside as the top half of the walls is fitted with cross-wire meshing. Inside, except for the *vahana* (vehicle of the deity), the absence of any furniture permits unfettered movements. The sacredness of the interior is further visually enhanced by

[3] A small thatched shrine for Muniswaran (or Muniandi) had existed since the earliest years of the settlement. Although Muniswaran is probably the most ubiquitous male deity throughout the country, he is considered to be outside the orthodox divine pantheon, indexed in part by his preference for meat and alcohol. In recent years, however, his lowly non-Agamic status has been gradually uplifted either by amalgamation with another Agamic deity (for example, Ganesha), or by upgrading priests, rituals and temple architecture (Aveling 1978: 181)

kolams or *yantras* (auspicious designs) colourfully drawn on the floors and walls. Sketched on the ceiling are also stylised geometric patterns. An electric-powered flashing board, depicting the iconic primal sound of creation, *pranava aum*, with the words 'Aum Shakti' inscribed below, hangs prominently facing the entrance.

Like the dwelling houses, the cramped conditions enveloping the *kovil* have necessitated various innovations. Elderly residents pointed out to me that the temple grounds originally extended to a much larger area, but had shrunk to the present compact size over the years because of the pragmatic need for land to build houses. For now, the *kovil* is surrounded by dwelling houses with no visible demarcation of boundaries. Only a small 'clearing' to its front (facing the beneficent east) has remained of its former expanse. When required for festivities, additional space is created by residents dismantling the removable wooden fencing in front of their houses. This happened on at least two occasions during my field-work; for the annual *thiruvila* festivities, and for an inaugural divine marriage ceremony. In the case of the former, a fire-pit was dug for the fire-walking ceremony; for the latter, a pavilion was erected for the deities and wedding guests.

Unlike established or Sanskritic temples, the daily *puja* does not require the presence of a Brahmin *kurrukkal* and temple musicians. A full-time *pujari* is deemed adequate to perform the bulk of the festivities, but a *kurrukkal* was specially hired for the divine marriage ceremony.[4] Daily attendances at the *kovil* are small, and the *pujas* conducted in a relaxed ambience. Quite frequently, the *pujari* and his young male apprentice are the only ones present. They would be joined occasionally by individuals seeking special prayers before an undertaking or for difficult family and personal circumstances. On Friday evenings, a day considered particularly auspicious for *puja*, the number of devotees in the *kovil* increases significantly, averaging between twenty and thirty persons. An overwhelming majority are women, female teenagers and children. As there is no strictly enforced time period for attending *puja*, devotees often trickle into the *kovil* for their own prayers even after the main *puja* (announced through chiming a bell) has been performed. After the main *puja*, children are frequently led in *bhajan* singing by an elderly male resident for about an hour, while adults and teenagers sit on the floor to listen and converse. Alternatively, audio cassettes of Tamil devotional

[4] When I made a return visit about a year later, the local *pujari* had taken over the reciting of the *mantras*. Although the crowd seemed to be smaller, the preparations were just as elaborate as before.

songs are played over the public address system for about an hour or so. Physical movements within the *kovil* are generally unrestricted. Except for the area around the *vahana* and the deities, children are hardly discouraged from treating the interior of the temple as an extension of their playing area. Relatively few men attend *pujas* even on Fridays. Apart from the temple committee members (all men save one), those who come tend to be young males who have just finished schooling and are factory employees or office peons. Frequently, another prominent group of young men is present, though they remain outside the *kovil* at the edge of the 'clearing'. Congregating around their motorcycles, they chat loudly in the night shadows until most of the female teenagers have left for home. The only occasions when the proportion of males increases significantly are during major festivals like the *thiruvila.*

As in India. patronising and publicly participating in calendrical religious festivals have long been culturally valued markers, and recognised means of stating and affirming social positions and relationships. Persons who occupy leadership positions in a Hindu temple or who take up prominent ritual roles during festivals are readily recognised as possessing emblems of prestige and honour. At the same time, they are also ideally expected to be generous as benefactors and to display a civic 'personalised social trust' (Mines 1994). Invariably, a certain degree of manoeuvring and negotiation is involved in cultivating this social symbiosis between the 'mundane' and the 'sacred'. For those who are unsuccessful, a radical line of action might be pursued.[5]

Within the committee itself, there is a delicate tension between two principal positions. Younger leaders voice the need to 'modernise' temple life through greater accountability, discipline and long-term management and planning of activities. The sentiments expressed in private are even strident—'inactive committee members must be purged and new, younger people included'. Others, by contrast, counsel the wisdom of well-trodden paths and the need to avoid rushing into new and untried ways. In one of these conversations, the Great Wall of China was offered by an elderly committee member as an analogy for the durability of traditional wisdom against reformist arguments. To embrace modernity uncritically might mean opening the door to moral decay and corruption, such as is apparently evident in the West. There is a general consensus,

[5] For instance, some years ago when one of the faction leaders of the *kampung* failed to secure coveted positions in both the Mariyamman *kovil* and the local branch of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) political party, a substitute leadership role was forged in a neighbouring Murugan *kovil.*

nevertheless, that partisan politics should not influence or be integrally involved in what is regarded as a strictly local temple jurisdiction. This is not merely a philosophical position, but is believed to have been born out of the divisive and painful experiences of the past.[6] The intervention of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)[7] political machinery was viewed as necessary in specific instances given the nature of patronage politics in the country. The MIC could help gain easier access to state resources or in shortcutting bureaucratic matters. It is a precarious balancing act that cannot be avoided.

IV
Colour and heat in the thiruvila

For local residents, the *thiruvila* is the most significant and anticipated festive event of the year. There is a conjunction of ritual obligations and personal and communal intentions. People speak variedly of a renewed commitment to Mariyamman, of making special requests, honouring answered prayers, and of fostering a sense of community. At the individual level, the theme of votiveness is prominent—performing *kavadi* and participating in fire-walking are visible expressions of answered prayers or ritual precursors to them. The list of existential problems is diverse, and dependent on the circumstances of the individual devotees. Health and illness, important school examinations, family or personal crises, employment opportunities and business worries are the more frequently recurring ones.

As a ritual occasion organised in honour of Mariyamman, the *thiruvila* is also a mythical collective space created for the goddess to manifest herself powerfully to her devotees. In South India, her special presence during this time has been described in spectacular terms:

> [The] village goddess seems to erupt on the scene, to wake up from a state of quiescence to a state of frenzied activity. During an epidemic, or during her festival, which often coincides with the epidemic, the village goddess forces herself on the awareness of the villagers (Brubaker 1978, cited in Kinsley 1986: 204).

[6] In the early 1980s, factional struggles for political recognition by the MIC had escalated into violence and a *kampung* youth was killed.

[7] The MIC was formed in August 1946 after the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to British Malaya. It was modelled closely after the Indian National Congress (in India), and initially sought to address issues of citizenship and political representation.

Certain modifications to ritual performances have nonetheless been adopted under the pressure of reformist movements in Malaysia. For instance, public animal blood sacrifices, traditionally viewed as essential for invigorating the goddess for her contests with the demons who invade her village or, alternatively, for appeasing her wrath, have ceased. And so has the practice of a devotee being suspended by hooks embedded in his back as part of heroic vows undertaken during the aroused state of this period. For now, only the fire-walking ceremony persists.

The *thiruvila* has not always been routinely organised in Kampung Mariyamman. I was told in cryptic terms that there was a period of neglect not long after the *kovil* was initially built, but for more than a decade now the *thiruvila* has been successfully held. To organise a *thiruvila* even on a moderate scale involves reaching a critical mass of cooperative persons, an achievement perhaps not possible earlier. Moreover, the exigencies of urban living have necessitated various modifications. In the plantation setting, the *thiruvila* could continue for up to nine days, but in the towns and cities it has been reduced to three days, and conveniently celebrated over a weekend.

Given the spatial compactness of Kampung Mariyamman, the drama of the *thiruvila* also inevitably entered into the conscious spaces of Christian, Muslim and Sikh residents living cheek by jowl with their Hindu neighbours. While there were onlookers joining the crowd, some also took pains to avoid witnessing the events and fastidiously maintained a safe distance. This was confirmed by observant devotees themselves. An elderly resident, for example, remembered that in the distant past it was not uncommon for Malay-Muslims to be present at the *thiruvila*, but because of the reformist teachings of Islam as well as the surveillance of Muslim officials this was not apparent any more. In other cases, public distancing was self-imposed, as seemed to be the case for a male teenager I encountered. He declared himself to be a member of a Pentecostalist Christian church, and noted with an evident sense of achievement that, despite having resided in the settlement for fifteen years, he had never once witnessed—much less participated in—the festivities. 'One must believe in only one god', was his succinct reason. Indeed, polytheistic beliefs and practices were regarded as the resort of lesser spiritual beings, hampering the realisation of the authority of the one true God. In his study of spiritual agency in South India, Lionel Caplan (1989: 96ff.) has observed that Pentecostalist and charismatic Christian beliefs resonate with South Asian popular ideas on the aetiology of affliction. Within this logic, maleficent spiritual forces attempt to

deceive humans by appearing in the guise of Hindu deities and demons. Nominal Christians as well as Hindus are vulnerable to such attacks, and it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that 'true believers' are able to overcome the agents of affliction, and accrue various gifts and boons.

The *thiruvila* was ambivalent as well for another small group of male youths residing in the *kampung*. Although they were present at all the major festivities during my fieldwork, they never once ventured into the *kovil* for *puja*. As I have noted earlier, they usually congregated around their motorcycles to converse and watch from a distance. Commentaries on the moral fibre of these youths were a frequent topic of conversations among older residents. The high incidence of crime, gang fights, drug abuse and general disrespect for elders was attributed to a host of factors—disciplinary neglect by their overworked parents, the ill-effects of movies, television and videos, the trappings of urban Western-type atheistic materialism and, the most vital of all, a weakening of their Indian identity and heritage. In turn, issues of identity were attributed to their degree of fluency in the Tamil language and devotion to Hindu beliefs and practices.

In Kampung Mariyamman, it was Krishna, a part-time assistant *pujari* in his mid-30s, who expounded to me an explicit programme of corrective action. He felt that the Mariyamman *kovil* could do more than just perform rituals and celebrate festivals. Like the activities of bigger temples, Tamil language tuition and religious classes could be provided for children and teenagers in the settlement. But Krishna was an enigmatic personality as well. He and his wife Ratna were relative newcomers to the settlement, having moved into their present abode some eight years earlier. In comparison to the full-time *pujari*, Krishna maintained a distant and detached aura. Over the years, he had acquired a working knowledge of some Hindu rites and *mantras* through attending religious retreats, reading manuals, and listening to audio cassettes. His household's celebration of domestic rites (for example, Thai Ponggal) thus tended to be more elaborate than others. Moreover, Krishna was also viewed with some circumspection by other residents. This was partially reflected in the absence of unanimous support for his reformist efforts, which were consequently fragmentary and piecemeal.[8]

[8] During the *thiruvila*, for instance, he set up a small stall offering Hindu devotional literature and various religious items for sale. Two boys were conscripted to mind the stall for the purpose of 'instilling a sense of responsibility and to give them a chance to practise their arithmetic'.

When rare opportunities arose, Krishna was quick to seize them. This was evident during the afternoon recess before the *thiruvila* celebrations recommenced in the evening. A cohort of these youths had congregated for tea and biscuits in the shade of the 'clearing'. As this was one of my earliest encounters with them, our conversation was light-hearted. When Krishna joined us, however, the ambience changed abruptly as he launched into a short, impromptu monologue on the relevance of Hinduism. To maintain the attention of his captive audience, a copiously illustrated book on Hinduism (published in California) was produced. Festivals like the *thiruvila*, Krishna stressed, provided opportunities for both the young and the old to work together for the common good of the *kampung*. Unlike politically organised events sponsored by the MIC, they do not arouse ill-feelings or factions. Like a car battery that needs periodic charging to remain in effective working condition, these festivals were necessary calendrical events for the 'recharging' of the local landscape.[9]

That June morning, the *thiruvila* attracted about 400 men, women and children. Apart from Kampung Mariyamman, others came from the neighbouring *kampungs* and the low-cost flats across the river. The retinue of persons performing the *kavadi* (ritual burden) comprised five men, six women and two young boys. The *kavadi* carriers wore either saffron coloured or white clothing. Two men shouldered arches decorated with peacock feathers (*mayil kavadi*), while the rest carried *pal kavadi* (milk in metal pots) on their heads. An important aspect of the *thiruvila* involved these *kavadi* carriers and their supporters traversing a short route beginning from a guardian shrine situated at the northern sector of the settlement to the *kovil*, a geomantic movement that is mythically akin to the descent of Mariyamman on to the settlement. A major portion of the route was within the settlement itself, but because of the spatial congestion of the dwelling houses it necessarily involved traversing the main road for about 30 metres before turning back into the settlement and the temple. The retinue was led by a rotund devotee possessed by Muniswaran, easily recognisable by his signature items of a sword and a cigar. As the procession wound its way slowly through the narrow footpaths, devotees whose homes were on the route stood patiently waiting with buckets of turmeric water to pour over the bodies of the devotees to 'cool' them down. In return, sacred ash (*vibhuti*) was placed on their palms or smeared on their foreheads by Muniswaran.

[9] Krishna's liking for scientific metaphors was demonstrated on another occasion some months later when he initiated an all-night *homa* (fire sacrifice). According to Krishna, the *homa* acted as 'a special fax machine which can transmit to God our special requests'.

Over the entire duration of the procession, there was a continuous barrage of rhythmic music and shouts of '*vel, vel*' and 'Om Shakti'. Two specially hired temple musicians playing the *nadeswaren* (clarinet) and *davul* (drum) provided the backbone of the musical accompaniment. Additionally, a number of *kavadi* devotees were singled out for special attention by their family members singing *bhajans*, clinking finger bells or beating on empty metal food bins as improvised drums. Bunching close to the devotees, they provided both visible and aural support. For the most part, the *kavadi* devotees would walk and sway steadily but occasionally some would break into a short, agitated jig. The music would flare up at this point, the retinue pausing momentarily until the jig subsided before proceeding onwards. One particular young devotee bearing a *mayil kavadi* frequently held up the procession as he danced vigorously, prompting one spectator to comment casually to me that he was probably 'a first timer'.

Although aural fanfare was integral to the procession, there was also a discordant strand introduced by the exuberance of a small group of male teenagers who seemed more intent on merrymaking than on religious observances. Dressed in T-shirts and jeans, some of them sporting 'punk' hairstyles, they presented a stark contrast to the devotees. With their own improvised drums and whistles, they tried to keep closely to the rhythms set by the temple musicians. But it was also evident that, engrossed in their own activity, they frequently disrupted the temple musicians' concentration. At one point during the procession, the temple musicians abruptly stopped playing and shrugged their shoulders in exasperation before commencing once again. Owing to the auspiciousness of the event, no words of reprimand were uttered and the group of volunteer musicians followed the retinue to the terminus of the procession, the 'fire-pit'.[10]

While the actual distance traversed was only about 100 metres at most, the procession nevertheless took slightly more than an hour to complete. By this time, all the vital ingredients that go into raising the ritual temperature of a Hindu festival—'colour and heat', in Brenda Beck's memorable phrase (1969)—had palpably coincided. The blazing heat of the tropical midday sun and of the glowing embers, the packed crowd of sweaty spectators lined close to the pit, the fragrant smell of incense, and the loud rhythmic music of the temple musicians thickened

[10] Problems like these are amplified in large-scale religious events like Thaipusam, commemorating Lord Murugan, when thousands of youth gangs congregate. Scores of anti-riot police in full gear have also become a regular feature of the event

the atmosphere with drama, expectancy and excitement. Male attendants explained that they had spent the night before digging the pit, and had lit the logs some hours earlier. The presiding *pujari* was the first to walk across the fire-pit, paving the path, as it were, for the *kavadi* devotees to follow. Before they did so, however, all were questioned for a few moments by the *pujari* to see that they were ready for the feat. A spectator, in response to my query, remarked that this was to ascertain whether Mariyamman would be sufficiently satisfied with their ritual preparations to 'descend' (*turun*) into them. Subsequently, two such adult devotees 'failed' the test and walked around the half circumference of the pit instead.

While fire-walking is viewed as an extraordinary feat that evokes a sense of awe at the protective power of Mariyamman over her devotees, this did not preclude an element of participative glee as well. Hesitant walkers were urged on with encouraging shouts, and after each successful crossing, the crowd applauded and cheered loudly. Each devotee had a distinctive walking style, and their degree of confidence was reflected in the manner in which they strolled nonchalantly or ran nervously across the pit, the former eliciting especially loud cheers. Of the retinue, only the two young boys were not questioned, but they were led along the outer earth edges of the pit rather than through the centre. A couple of the successful *kavadi* devotees decided to walk across the pit a second time, additionally carrying on their shoulders young infants. The male attendants were the last to cross the pit.

Compared to the preceding events, the closure of the fire-walking ritual was rather abrupt. When the last individuals had crossed the pit, jasmine petals were tossed into the pit before devotees and spectators alike helped to quickly cover it up with earth. Within a few minutes, the fire-pit had reverted to its previous condition with little trace of its recent use. A free vegetarian lunch was provided shortly afterwards. For men, the allotted eating area was on a tarpaulin laid over the transformed pit, while women and children had their lunch on tables and chairs in a sheltered structure erected adjacent to the *kovil*. While the large crowd was welcomed, one of the local leaders later privately commented to me that the promise of a nourishing feast blessed by Mariyamman herself is often an added attraction for devotees who seldom come for regular worship in the *kovil*. Significantly, the group of discordant male youths did not join in the meal. They stood on the periphery of the clearing, waiting for a sign to be invited to participate. With no invitation forthcoming, they left quietly not long afterwards. The festive atmosphere continued with a

constant barrage of taped *bhajans* and announcements on the sale of coupons for *archanai* (offerings). Only about an hour after the end of the fire ceremony did the crowd begin to thin considerably. Kampung Mariyamman was temporarily marked by a measure of regained composure until the festivities resumed later in the evening with the 'chariot' or 'car' (*ratham*) being taken for a procession (*oorvalam*) around the locale.

V
Darshan *and houses*

Preparations for the chariot procession in the evening unfolded at a leisurely pace, allowing people to rest, return home from work, bathe, dress and recongregate at the temple grounds in readiness. When the proceedings began, the sun had set and the grounds were once again swollen with a crowd of people milling in the semi-darkness. After the conclusion of the evening *puja*, Krishna and another young assistant carefully cradled Mariyamman out of her niche, and with gentle 'rocking' motion circumambulated clockwise once around the temple preceded by a pair of musicians and a train of pubescent girls cupping oil lamps and flowers. Mariyamman was then placed onto the chariot, securely fastened and garlanded with flowers. Because Mariyamman was to be taken around in public, her eyes and lips were cosmetically enhanced. Retrieved from a corner of the clearing a day earlier, the chariot was now brightly lit by a ring of bulbs electrically powered by a noisy petrol generator. Before the chariot procession set off, another *puja* was briefly performed in front of Mariyamman. Announcements over the public address system reminded devotees to bring their torchlights for the unlit areas of the settlements. As the chariot was pulled by a group of young men out of the 'heart' of the settlement on to the bustling main road, a train of colourfully costumed pubescent girls carrying a tray of flowers preceded the procession for a short distance. Also moving systematically from house to house were a couple of boisterous youths collecting monetary donations from the public in cloth bags. During the entire duration of the procession, there was much aural fanfare but male voices dominated the night air. In comparison to daily *puja* in the *kovil*, the active participation of young men and male teenagers was strikingly evident during the chariot procession. They supplied excited comments and lively banter, while the women and children followed behind, relatively subdued in their demeanour and conversation. Oral communication breaching the gender divide was rare.

Along the busy main road, teenagers acted as scouts walking slightly ahead of the chariot to shepherd the heavy vehicular traffic with relish. Drivers in buses, cars and motorcycles slowed their speed to a crawl to gaze at the procession of chariot and people. Within the unlit, narrow footpaths between squatter houses, the task of the scouts shifted to that of looking out for potholes, overhead electricity lines or tree branches that would disrupt the smooth journey of Mariyamman. Their observations would be echoed and relayed with gusto by other members of the procession. This apparent show of camaraderie and collective cooperation was further consolidated with the distribution and consumption of boiled chickpeas and carton drinks throughout the duration of the procession. Though a small number of the retinue left for home after a couple of hours because they had to be up early for factory work the next morning, there was still a sizeable group remaining until the completion of the procession and its return to the *kovil* at around 1 A.M.

The procession unfolded at a leisurely and negotiated pace, with little sense of haste. At numerous points along the route, the chariot was brought to a momentary halt to receive the *archanai* of devotees. A typical offering would consist of half a coconut, a bunch of bananas, jasmine petals, a small heap of turmeric powder, mango leaves and burning joss-sticks placed on a silver tray. Krishna—the presiding *pujari* for the night—broke off a portion of the bananas, lit a camphor cube and sprinkled some *vibhuti* on to the tray before reverentially waving the contents close to the face of Mariyamman in a deliberate clockwise motion. The contents were then returned to the devotee. Often infants were also offered up by their parents to be auspiciously viewed and blessed by the deity. As is well known to devotees, the religious *raison d'être* of the chariot procession is to allow the tutelary deity to view her domain. One of the residents expressed it as allowing 'the chance for Mariyamman to see the neighbourhood and to drive away unwelcome spirits that may be found in trees and bushes'. Just as importantly, the inhabitants are also eager to receive *darshan*, the act of visual glancing during the *thiruvila* being considered particularly auspicious.

In rural villages with more open spaces, planning the route of a religious procession might be an uncomplicated affair in comparison to urban settings where the promiscuous mix of ethnic and religious groups could be an ingredient for volatile situations. The routes of temple processions are seldom straightforwardly decided on, and invariably involve negotiations with the local authorities (notably the police), as well as a careful mapping of the spatial politics of the locale by the organising

committee. Mattison Mines's study (1994) of a town in South India, for instance, indicates that the local temple's domain often coincided with the constituencies of the local 'big men' (*periyar*) or persons of eminence (*nambi*). A chariot procession traversing a territory without prior approval might be read as an act of intrusion and aggression.

Notwithstanding the detailed planning and orchestration, a public procession is also an emotively charged event involving elements of risk and unpredictability. It is an event where contending human agents can strategically crystallise their concerns in visibly stark terms. Indeed, past chariot processions of the Mariyamman *kovil* had been occasions where verbal taunts and fist fights had flared up. Neighbouring Indian youth gangs had vehemently claimed that the chariot was illegitimately traversing the domain of another *gramadevata*. Moreover, among local residents it was also common knowledge that youth gangs from afar often made use of these public processions as opportunities for merrymaking and mischief at the local *kampung*'s expense. Thus, ostensible contests over religious territoriality merged with secular territorial disputes and competing status claims between rival youth gangs. While such situations could be pre-empted by police escorts, resident-devotees also felt uneasy about police presence in their midst. Over the years, subsequent routes were changed or shortened. Additionally, efforts were made to draw in the largest possible crowd for safety in numbers.

That year, police chaperones did not appear as expected. As the night wore on, the route of the chariot became more flexible as the organisers negotiated where to risk going next. Mariyamman was eventually taken on an extended tour up to the other end of the main thoroughfare where a number of other Indian settlements were situated. This effectively meant that the glittering chariot and joyous entourage would be open en route to maximum public viewing by non-Indian residents. Significantly, the chariot also avoided entering Kampung Keretapi. This *kampung* is a relatively recent settlement created in the mid-1980s to accommodate about 400 households relocated to make way for a shopping mall. The residents are housed in rows of barrack-like *rumah panjang*. Additionally, a fairly large piece of vacant land was provided for the re-siting of the local *kovil* which had Gengai Amman as the presiding deity. Over the years, youth gangs from the two *kampungs* had clashed on a number of occasions. As one of the youths eloquently described to me with gestures to match, they were mostly *potong* ('cutting') fights where knives, razor blades and bicycle chains were used to inflict as much injury as possible on the opposing side. The families of the respective

youths were also drawn into the conflict, leading to strained relationships between the residents of the two *kampungs*. As in Kampung Mariyamman, punitive police raids into the settlement were frequent, but residents resented their heavy-handed and indiscriminate rounding up of various people, young and old.

During casual conversations, my tentative suggestions that the clashes were drug or alcohol related were dismissed as superficial, or met with silence. At other times, rivalries over girlfriends or retaliations against verbal slurs were jokingly offered as motivations. But the most arresting prognosis of what might be amiss between these two contrasting settlements was offered through analogy with the moral quality of houses. One morning, while showing photographs of the *thiruvila* conducted a week earlier to a group of youths (including a trainee *pujari*) in the *kovil* of Kampung Keretapi, Lingam provided a suggestive lead. Although only in his late teens, Lingam projected a confident and articulate persona incommensurate with his age. He had a small stake in his family electrical business, and was also an active youth committee member of the *kovil*. Emblematic of this status, Lingam conspicuously carried around with him a black daily planner and a pager. Some years earlier, he had undergone an electrical training course in his hometown before seeking his fortune in Kuala Lumpur. Because of his reputed skills in electrical gadgetry, Lingam had been made responsible for the vital task of wiring up the chariot for the *thiruvila*. This was obviously a source of great pride to him. When our conversation touched tangentially on the subject of housing in the locality, Lingam became suddenly agitated. 'People staying in the *taman* and even in Kampung Mariyamman tend to look down on the people in Kampung Keretapi. Although I stay in a *rumah batu* in Taman Berjaya, I don't want to get involved in these fights!'

The suggestion that residents of Kampung Keretapi are of an 'inferior' status because of the nature of their dwellings resonated in another casual remark made by one of my key informants. In this context, Subramaniam had cryptically observed that while the 'Malays could live in any kind of house', the Indians and Chinese have, in comparison, more exacting geomantic requirements. Although his depiction of the ideal Malay house is dubious, Subramaniam's subtext was that living in structures which are in concord with the flow of invisible forces imbues the resident with a superior moral status, irrespective of the visible signs of material affluence. His remark was so cast as to invert through the idiom of dwelling houses the prevailing hegemony of the political landscape.

In his discussion of the Tamil house in South India, Valentine Daniel (1984: 105ff.) has suggested that the 'figurative reality' of Tamil culture predisposes its speakers to construe houses and territory in person-centric terms. Like persons, houses are imbued with qualities and substances that require attention to their compatibility with and vulnerability to other houses. In other words, houses are imputed to stand for social groups and represent the surrounding world. Like the human body, houses are 'basic cognitive models used to structure, think and experience the world' (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 3). In the context of a working-class ethnic community ensconced within a locality that has seen radical demographic and aesthetic displacements over the past decade, the house is similarly a convenient homology for thinking about and marking social relationships. It does not so much explain as it signifies social and political hierarchies by conflating a whole plethora of intersecting relationships. For South Indians, in particular, the similarity between the *rumah panjang* and the plantation 'coolie' barrack is striking, and suggests a poignant throwback to the 'lowly' past, a past which most are keen to surmount and forget.

To be sure, this imputed social status of Kampung Keretapi was actively contested by its local leaders. Once again, this is significantly prominent in the *thiruvila* and other publicly visible religious events. A well-known Tamil adage identifies the Hindu temple as the ideal focus of the well-being of any Hindu settlement. The pomp and elaborateness with which religious rituals and festivals are celebrated are thus not only actions deemed befitting for a deity, but also provide an index of the prosperity and cohesiveness of the worshipping community. An indication of the seriousness in which this visual contest is conducted came to my attention on the night of the chariot procession of Gengai Amman, celebrated about a month after Kampung Mariyamman's. The chariot was much bigger and higher, and had hundreds of tiny bulbs enveloping the niche in which the goddess would sit. A two-tonne generator towed by a small truck was rented for the occasion. The goddess herself was sumptuously decked with garlands of multicoloured flowers, a feat that required the expertise of a *pujari* from another *kovil*. Before the chariot was hauled out of the enclosed temple grounds for a tour of the settlement, two rows of young costumed girls performed an elaborate traditional stick dance to the accompaniment of lively sacred music broadcast over loudspeakers. At the same time, a small team of teenage girls and male helpers wearing identically coloured *saris* and *kurtas* with personalised name tags moved around enthusiastically directing human traffic

and distributing boiled chickpeas and sweetmeats. Krishna had been watching in the night shadows from a short distance when our paths crossed unexpectedly. He was visibly irate. As if to nullify the visual feast before us, he blurted out that the spacious temple site was originally reserved for the residents of Kampung Mariyamman, but that it was due to 'the interference of politics into religion' that 'the land was suddenly taken away from us'. Krishna drew an ominous parallel with the ethno-religious conflicts in Sri Lanka and Bosnia to indicate how the situation might deteriorate should this trend be allowed to continue.[11]

VI
The public culture of urban Hinduism

I wish to suggest that varied attempts to accumulate and display cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990), as highlighted in the previous section, are not confined to the locality alone. Here, I extend my discussion beyond the fieldwork site to further draw out the 'public culture' of urban Hinduism. Rajoo (1993) has argued that urbanisation, modernisation and the politics of multi-ethnicity in Malaysia have led to various modifications, including a reduction in Hindu domestic rites, a weakening of inter-caste non-commensality, and changes in temple rituals. Moreover, he has suggested an increasing trend towards Agamic or Sanskritic versions of Hinduism. More orthodox Hindu festivals (Navarattiri, Shivarattiri, etc.), previously observed by the middle- and upper-ranking castes, are also being celebrated by smaller temples, and there is greater attention to the specifications of rituals as laid down in the *Agamas*. The notion of Sanskritic Hinduism is clearly indebted to Srinivas's pioneering study of the Coorgs in India (published in 1952). In his ethnographic example, Srinivas viewed Sanskritic Hinduism as theoretically opposed to village-based, local Hindu practices that do not draw from scriptural Sanskrit texts. 'Sanskritisation' is thus commonly understood as a process by which the beliefs and practices of lower castes are made to converge towards those of higher castes as the former try to raise their status by emulating the latter. While influencing subsequent studies, a number of

[11] However, it would be misleading to suggest the absence of any attempts at rapprochement. This was explicitly the case in the inaugural celebration of an elaborate and expensive divine wedding ceremony (associated with established Agamic temples) in the Mariyamman *kovil*. Devotees from various *kovils* in the locality were invited to participate by bringing wedding gifts.

criticisms have also been levelled against his division of Hinduism into two strata, the 'Great Tradition' and the 'Little Tradition'. C.J. Fuller, for instance, has contended that Srinivas 'made a stock anthropological error' in that he converted 'an indigenous, ideological distinction into an analytical concept, and then applied it to the empirical evidence to try to divide what is actually united by common underlying themes and principles' (Fuller 1992: 27).

I would argue, however, that despite the ideological baggage that the concept of Sanskritisation carries, it can be salvaged as a shorthand concept referring to a process of group consolidation through convergence towards Sanskritic-type Hinduism. In the context of Malaysian public culture, temples, ritual practices and public festivities are arenas not only for communicating with divine agencies but also reimagining social identities. This is discernible, for example, in the historical evolution of one of the earliest temples in the country. The Sri Maha Mariyamman Kovil Devastanam is located in the oldest section of Kuala Lumpur city, and was initially set up as a small shrine in 1873. Originally, it was patronised largely by the urban trading and artisan castes (particularly the Mukkulattor caste cluster), but its patronage has since widened considerably. Today, the Devastanam is portrayed as the most prestigious and influential Agamic temple in the country, and is consulted on ritual matters and other auspicious events in the Hindu calendar. It is also the obvious gravitational centre for aspiring Indian politicians and community leaders seeking religious sanction. Within this cultural logic, the president of the MIC, besides holding similar positions for a host of other Indian organisations in the country, is the undisputed official patron of the Devastanam. Other individuals and group factions jockeying for lesser positions have occasionally brought internal strife out in the open via 'flying letters', 'whispering campaigns' and the vernacular newspapers.

Because of its traditionally pre-eminent position and status in the Hindu landscape, difficulties have been known to arise vis-à-vis an increasingly influential umbrella organisation for Hindu temples and associations in the country, the Malaysian Hindu Sangam (MHS). The MHS was formed in 1965 by a group of Indian professionals, civil servants, teachers and businessmen. In comparison to numerous antecedent Hindu reform movements and Indian organisations which drew on a Dravidian ethos, the MHS has been evaluated as 'not anti-Brahminical and anti-Sanskritic in its outlook' (Lee and Rajoo 1987: 405*f*). Besides mediating the concerns of the Hindu community with the government and

with other religious bodies,[12] the MHS regularly organises programmes aimed at promoting a wider awareness and use of Hindu scriptures, sacred songs and writings by saints. The MHS is perhaps best known for the annual Tirumurai festival, when selected hymns inspired by the Nayanmars (Shaivite saints) are recited by devotees.

By contrast, the Devastanam coordinates the mammoth annual Thaipusam celebrations (associated with the Skanda-Murugan cult).[13] An integral part of the celebrations is an eight-hour-long chariot procession of Lord Subramaniam (another name of Murugan) from the Devastanam to the Batu Caves shrine, with designated stops at various temples along the way. The 'orgiastic' ritual practices of Thaipusam were originally a target of heavy criticism by leaders of the Tamil Reform Movement (TRA). They lobbied vigorously for Thaipusam to be banned but without much success. In the late 1940s, however, its leaders decided to abandon this strategy, explaining that banning such festivities might have the unintended and undesirable effect of causing the disappearance of piety and religion among the 'simpler folk'. Since then, and with each successive year, the celebrations of Thaipusam in urban centres are reported to be drawing progressively larger crowds of pilgrims, devotees and spectators. Many pilgrims travel not only from rural plantations and smaller towns within the state, but also from other states. Vernacular newspapers invariably highlight the participation of a much smaller group of foreign pilgrims who carry *kavadis* in Batu Caves, lending further credence to the potency of the event. Additionally, Thaipusam is promoted by independent tour companies and the Tourism Board as a 'colourful' spectacle and as another vivid illustration of the diversity of cultures in Malaysia. Consequently, busloads of incongruent-looking foreign tourists have become a regular feature of the Thaipusam landscape.

The preoccupation with planning, regulation and the closer monitoring of activities around the Batu Caves temple grounds has also intensified

[12] According to a survey conducted by the MHS in the mid-1980s, there are about 17,000 temples and shrines throughout the country, many of which are not registered. The MHS generally encourages larger and more established temples to move beyond celebrating religious festivals to paying more attention to the social needs of poorer Hindus through the setting up of education and welfare committees. By explicitly addressing these issues, the MHS hopes that the phenomenon of 'unethical' conversions to Islam and Christianity will be stemmed.

[13] Newspaper accounts of Thaipusam in Kuala Lumpur over a twenty-year period (1974–94) indicate that crowd attendance has risen dramatically from 300,000 to 700,000. Correspondingly, the number of devotees performing *kavadi* has grown from 1,000 to 3,000.

with the progressive increase in crowd numbers. Weeks before the event, the route and stops of the chariot procession, and special bus and train services, are announced in the newspapers. At the temple grounds, stalls set up for business require official permits from the organisers. Outside the site, unlicensed mobile food vendors hoping to generate extra earnings are stalked by City Hall officials cruising around in a bright red lorry. The organisers routinely appeal to devotees and spectators alike (particularly Indian youths) to refrain from expressive actions that will turn the religious celebrations into a 'carnival', a 'comic spectacle' and a 'mockery' of Hinduism. Stipulations on the permissible length of skewers and spears, on the type of music and musical instruments that can be used, bans on certain 'exhibitionist' *kavadis* and so forth are disseminated and enforced.

Thaipusam is thus a highly visible and religiously charged event open to a heterogeneous audience, both Hindu 'insiders' and non-Hindu 'outsiders'. It provides an arena for the expression of multiple meanings as well as varied agendas. Apart from the individual quest for 'ritual self-creation' (Babb 1976; Clothey 1978), other studies have analysed the event in terms of a muted corporate expression of a nascent working-class consciousness among the Tamils (Collins 1991: 309), and as an antithesis of Brahminic Sanskritisation (Lee 1989: 335). As I have suggested earlier, large-scale ritual events like these are also strategic sites for reimagining a collective sense of a global Hindu-Indian identity in the face of a perceived cultural inundation by other religious and ethnic groups. This management of a public culture is engendered by the religious potency of the event and the sheer numbers of Indians (Tamils and non-Tamils) present there. Significantly, key national political leaders also participate conspicuously in the temple rituals during these special moments while making laudatory statements regarding the unique cultural pluralism in the country, and the need to keep intact the delicate balance between various ethnic and religious groups. Moderation in beliefs and practices is counselled. Much media attention is paid to the MIC's appeals to the federal government to designate Thaipusam as a nation-wide public holiday (in addition to Deepavali).[14] The appeal has been made annually for the last thirty years, though without success.[15]

[14] Deepavali was probably chosen as a national holiday as the MIC was initially led by North Indians. From the mid-1950s, the MIC leadership has been increasingly 'Tamilised' (Arasaratnam 1970: 129ff.).

[15] Thaipusam is currently legislated as a regional holiday in states where there is a significant Indian population, namely, Johor, Negri Sembilan, Perak, Penang and Selangor.

Major religious festivities like these are organised by large, established urban temples. For many small temples and shrines scattered throughout the urban landscape, more pressing everyday concerns are prominent. In particular, what constitutes a proper Hindu temple has been rendered problematic in the light of the 'Kerling Incident' of 1978 as well as of recent urban planning priorities. Between 1978 and 1979, considerable media attention was focused on the trial of eight Indians accused of the killing of four Malay-Muslim youths in a clash that ensued when they appeared late at night to smash Hindu deities in a community temple. A spate of similar desecrations in other parts of the country had also been reported some months earlier. The deputy prime minister decried these localised actions as due to the 'twisted interpretations of Islamic teachings for the benefit of several of their leaders'.[16] Politicians and religious leaders alike pleaded for tolerance and mutual respect between Muslims and non-Muslims, and viewed these actions as jeopardising 'national unity' Like the ethnic riots of 'May 13', the 'Kerling Incident' has not diminished in the Hindu memoryscape. Indeed, it is often used as a convenient historical reference point to illustrate the adverse consequences of religious zealotry and the sense of the embattledness of Hinduism in Malaysia. At the same time, there were also attempts to mitigate these kinds of alarmist discourses. In my conversation with a Hindu Sangam representative, for instance, while it was conceded that the incident aroused considerable alarm at the time, when viewed through the lens of hindsight there was nevertheless a cumulative positive effect: 'temple desecration is now considered a serious criminal offence'. Although there continue to be occasional reports of break-ins into Hindu temples, he stressed that the culprits were drug addicts rather than religious fanatics, more keen on getting into the donation boxes (*undial*) than on making a theological point.

During the court trial of the 'Kerling Incident', police authorities laboured on the sheer impossibility of guarding the multitude of temples dotting the country. Indeed, as many were built on 'private' and 'public' land without prior approval from the planning authorities, knowledge of their very existence was fragmentary. Subsequently, in the early 1980s, the MHS embarked on a census and registration exercise of all temples and shrines in the country. Key Indian politicians also periodically discouraged the 'building of temples in every nook and corner of the country'. Moreover, a piece of legislation by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government that gave statutory bodies powers to regulate the

[16] 'Dr M[ahathir] hits at the desecrators', *New Straits times*, 24 May 1979 Dr. Mahathir is the current prime minister of Malaysia.

building of religious places of worship for non-Muslims was passed. It was argued that the demands of urban development projects required legal intervention against a seemingly random and haphazard mushrooming of shrines in the urban centres. While recognising that the days of unrestricted temple building are effectively over, many Hindu leaders of more established temples have resorted to discarding non-Agamic practices and to consolidating existing temples through refurbishments, to prevent easy relocation.

As suggested earlier, the management of religiosity in the public sphere has become more marked, particularly in the urban centres. In particular, during the 1980s, researchers in the Prime Minister's Department embarked on an extensive study of religion in Malaysia, alerted by the spawning of a number of non-mainstream Islamic groups which were vocally critical of the government's professed Islamisation track record. The spectre of religiously inspired confrontations and social unrest became the government's outstanding worry. The outcome of this research led to amendments to the Penal and Criminal Codes allowing religious dissent to be addressed (Ackerman and Lee 1988: 58*f*). Moreover, immigration policies with regard to the movement of foreign religious personnel—Muslim and non-Muslim—into the country were also modified to reflect this concern. One consequence has been that Hindu (as well as other non-Muslim) religious leaders frequently lament that these policies have become progressively more restrictive on South Asian nationals entering the country. Because the pool of local Brahmin *kurrukkals*, temple musicians and highly skilled temple sculptors is small, these individuals are still employed from India, especially for fulfilling certain special ritual requirements. *Sannyasis* and *swamis* also visit regularly to serve the more literate Hindu public. Subsequently, one of the important mediating tasks of organisations like the MHS has been to liaise regularly with the Immigration Department and other similar statutory bodies to secure the necessary official permits for their entry.

VII
Conclusion

Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and *communitas* have left an indelible mark on ritual and religious studies over the years. Basically, Turner (1969) argued that there is a dialectic between the mediacy of social structure (characterised as a 'closed society' or 'status system')

and the immediacy of *communitas* (an 'open society'). In the case of the latter, the modality of social relationships is typically, although not exclusively, engendered in religious rituals and festivities. While social structure is organised in terms of caste, class, or rank hierarchies, and consequently marked by oppositions and conflicts, the '*communitas* emerges where social structure is not'. Moreover, Turner also observed that, with the increasing social differentiation and specialisation of society and culture, there are tendencies to institutionalise the liminal 'betwixt and between' state in the shape of new religious orders and movements.

When weighed against the ethnographic evidence of my fieldwork site, Turner's model offers certain persuasive possibilities. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, it exaggerates the divide between the two kinds of social relations, and belies the analytical logic of culturally specific kinds of epistemologies. The 'religiosity' of social actors cannot be understood solely in terms of an impervious individualist quest for spiritual edification and benefits. The phenomenon is necessarily much more diffused, and entails an overlapping of localised knowledge and individual, social and political contexts. In particular, religious imageries, language and imagination are significant resources in negotiating with the socially mediated processes of Malaysian modernity. More to the point, in Kampung Mariyamman, being a 'Hindu' is as much informed by an awareness of being a culturally different and relatively disadvantaged ethnic group (Malaysian 'Indians') in the national ethnoscape, as by the more immediate experience of local-level power struggles around the *kovil*.

Given the historical particulars of Hinduism in Malaysia and the nature of routine interaction within the settlement, religious festivals like the *thiruvila* engender various layers of mythical and social space for organisers and participants alike. In the first instance, these ritual events invariably allow personal needs and anxieties to be addressed, but the spatialised idioms and carnivalesque elements of this celebration are also particularly convenient for a number of other more corporate agendas. For instance, Anthony Cohen (1985) has argued that these kinds of symbolic activities are relatively fluid and expansive enough to allow participants to articulate a shared sense of belonging, of common identity, and of difference from non-participants. Moreover, the multivocality of these activities does not easily allow others to subvert and denigrate the intentions of the participants. In Kampung Mariyamman, I have suggested that the territoriality of Mariyamman provides her discerning devotees with an appropriate boundary-expressing activity, where the *kampung*'s

spatial and symbolic boundaries have been incrementally undermined and blurred by the influx over the years of Malay-Muslim residents. There is a palpable sense of ethnic and cultural inundation and fragmentation. With the present 'community' life being far from convivial, the *thiruvila* also provides important occasions to reconstitute 'community' through an inscription of locality. Against the perceived cultural and spatial hegemony of Malay-Muslims, a semblance of power, authority and ownership over the locality is staked and paraded, and the *kampung* residents momentarily revel in their mobility. With respect to other Indian residents living in the envied 'modern housing' (*rumah batu*) or the maligned *rumah panjang* in the neighbouring *kampung*, the festival allows devotees to make thinly veiled public statements about the continued efficacy of Mariyamman and the conviviality of Kampung Mariyamman as a whole despite its troubled past and fragmented present. In short, the *thiruvila* allows for a publicly ritualised distancing from non-participants as well as an accentuation of symbolic boundaries, involving both externalised opposition and internalised levelling.

The chariot procession itself within the immediate locality fulfils the ritual function of 'filling out' mundane spaces through the idiom of mythical meanings. By doing so, it transforms these spaces into a habitable place, and the local landscape is rendered religiously recognisable to its devotees. The affective bond between people and place, and between individuals, is once again symbolically reconstituted. In comparison to the massive chariot procession of Lord Murugan during Thaipusam, a festival which has a wider spectrum of agendas, the local chariot procession meets parochial needs and has more manageable organisational parameters. While there may be a difference of scale between these practices, the experiences of social actors are nevertheless informed by the linkages and self-representations that interpenetrate them.

Simultaneously, there is an element of local rivalry and competition mediated through the notion of territorial 'village goddesses'. The indeterminacy, multivocality and carnivalesque elements of these public ritual events also provide particularly useful opportunities for different individuals and groups to promote their non-religious agendas. In the ethnographic example of Kampung Mariyamman and the locality, I have illustrated how new and more elaborate ritual practices were selectively conscripted to 'elevate' and publicise the material status and moral standing of the residents. Additionally, non-religious markers could be deployed for the same purpose. For instance, I made reference to temple leaders in the nearby *kovil* of Kampung Keretapi incorporating 'modern'

public relations and marketing strategies in their *thiruvila* (and other celebrations) so as to reflect a veneer of professionalism. By comparison, the inclusion of Sanskritic religious events into the temple calendar of Kampung Mariyamman, which has a less cohesive *kampung* spirit and a smaller *kovil* membership than Kampung Keretapi, suggests something similar. Thus, while the inaugural celebration of an expensive and highly elaborate divine marriage ceremony was expressly initiated to foster closer relations between Hindus resident in the locality, it would not be too far-fetched to read into it an element of veiled rivalry as well. The all-night *homa* ceremony initiated by Krishna in Kampung Mariyamman, in a similar vein, was not only to improve the participants' karmic position and build up a *kampung* spirit, but also to underscore the universality and appropriateness of a Sanskritic-type Hinduism for modern urban living.

In the act of ritualisation, there thus inhere both strategic and tactical possibilities, serving to accumulate, display and buttress vested interests. Ritualisation illustrates once again that human beings not only live in existing relationships but also produce new kinds of relationships in order to live. It could be argued that, by asserting their cultural and religious autonomy, many Hindus in the *kampung* are responding spontaneously to perceived growing dispersions, intrusions and intolerance of their faith. For local leaders, however, these isolated and individualised incidents of solidarity are neither recurrent nor extensive enough to build up durable safeguards. They characteristically lament the present state as one marked by an absence of a cohesive ethnic identity and solidarity, requiring in turn the antidote of a rejuvenated Hindu community.

I have argued here that a broader understanding of the ethnicised religious and political landscapes in Malaysia illustrates how residents are constituted in the immediate locality of Kampung Mariyamman. Conversely, I have looked to everyday practices as prisms revealing the linkages between different sites that contribute towards a 'public culture' of Hinduism. There is a keen, if sometimes tentatively articulated, recognition and awareness that Hindu devotees are living in difficult and rapidly changing times. On the one hand, secularist modernisation and aggressive proselytisation by other religious groups combine to render Hindu beliefs and practices seemingly archaic and irrelevant to the young. In everyday life and experiences, ordinary Hindu devotees and leaders encounter a range of indicators that portray their faith as irrational, and as a religious system that is incommensurate with the truth claims of monotheistic and modernising Christian and Islamic groups. On the other hand, there is unease that, as a politically demarcated

group, ethnic 'Indians' are being left behind in the country's current phase of rapid 'development' and economic buoyancy. The high incidence of crime and drug abuse by an underclass of Indian youths eloquently epitomises this double bind. These tensions are felt particularly acutely in a squatter settlement like Kampung Mariyamman, situated on the margins of both trends. Informed by these contending forces, leaders and devotees alike endeavour to construct a meaningful and recognisable locality by re-creating Hinduism within the spaces where they live, work and play.

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The burden of history: Obstacles to power sharing in Sri Lanka

Michael Roberts

For around seventeen centuries the Sinhalese have sustained a historical consciousness through oral and written modes of transmission. These vamsa *traditions emphasise the moment of civilisational state formation through the founding father, Vijaya, a tale that enters modern history texts and thus receives the status of 'fact'. This tale enters contemporary verbal battles of legitimation between Sinhalese and Tamil protagonists. A recent article by Wickramasinghe indicates how the Vijaya story can be a central pillar in the refusal to countenance devolution of power to the Tamils in the north-east. His unelaborated reference to Vijaya indicates how the belief in the Sinhalese claims to original possession operates in semi-subterranean ways among those extremists who deny the need for autonomy on various constitutional grounds in the vocabulary of democracy. One such is the Sinhala Urumaya (Heritage) Party that emerged in mid-2000 and around which many lines of opposition to the government's 'Devolution Package' coalesced. Despite its poor electoral performance in October 2000, the SU represents a powerful strand of thinking that bears the values associated with the 'revolution of 1956', values which are now ingrained in all the Sinhala-dominated parties.*

History writing in Sri Lanka in the 20th century has been governed by the predominance of the written mode of story-telling. It has also been directed by an emphasis on empirical 'fact', rational coherence, chronology and the linear perspective associated with retrospective teleology. These emphases contrast with the 'puranic history' of the Indian civilisation, and the mythic history of the early Greeks. The puranic history, for instance, focused on the deeds of gods and kings. It sponsored stories of cosmological scope on a cosmological plane (Chatterjee 1994). And further south, the Tamil writings of a puranic type were suffused by the devotionalism of *bhakti* and emphasised the heritage carried by the Tamil language and its cultural concomitants (Daniel 1997; Hudson 1990; Ramaswamy 1997).

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Within the context of the Indic civilisational order, therefore, the Pali and other writings of the Sinhala literati in Lanka[1] during the first millennium A.D. were quite exceptional. These *vamsa* chronicles were composed by Buddhist 'monks' (*bhikkhus*) and were conceived as a religious project, framed within an overarching attitude of piety and directed intentionally towards 'the serene joy and emotion of the pious'. But religion and politics were intertwined in Lanka, as indeed they were in India. The message in these *vamsa* stories rendered Lanka into a special place and its people into a chosen body, a collective entrusted with the task of preserving the island as a land that would sustain Buddhism in its pristine form. Thus charged, the Sinhalese and their kings were presented with a vision and a responsibility that has been compared to the Yahweh cult of the Judaic civilisation (Malalgoda 1970: 431–34). The result was the inscription of two sister concepts, the *Dhammadîpa* and *Sîhaladîpa* ideas, rendering the island into a sacred place for (Thêravâda) Buddhism and making the Sinhalese a chosen people.[2]

This message was wrapped around a chronological history of the principal Sinhala kingdoms. In keeping with this framework, the *vamsa* annals were regularly updated. Elements from the original stories were also incorporated into the updated histories produced in the colloquial Sinhala medium from the 14th century onwards. These were sometimes local or provincial in scope and are variously called *Râjâvaliya, Bandâravaliya, Vistaraya* and *Kadaim pot*.[3] The *Râjâvali* (plural form) manuscripts are histories of the lineage of kings. The continuing force of the *Dhammadîpa* concept is revealed in one such product, the *Buddharâjâvaliya*. Though the title translates as 'History of the Buddhas', this palm-leaf document in fact describes the deeds of kings. Its concluding sentence links the Buddha, King Mahâsammata and the king Suddhhodana. In effect, it is a 'History of the Royal Family of the Buddha' (Kulasuriya 1978: 24–25).

Many of these *Râjâvali* provide legendary accounts of the origin of the universe. The *Buddharâjâvaliya* is no different. Its author 'begins his work with a brief cosmogony giving in outline the different spheres of the universe and the place of the earth, with Mount Meru at its centre, in the entire scheme' (Kulasuriya 1978: 25). The desire to establish a linear link with the primordial moment of origin appears to have been a

[1] The island was also called Tâmraparni, Sâimhala or Sîhala (Mendis 1965: 265–67)

[2] This paragraph is informed by Godakumbura (1961), Greenwald (1978), Kemper (1991: 2, 33–37), Malalgoda (1970: 431–34), Mendis (1965), and Perera (1961).

[3] See Abeyawardana (1999), D G.B de Silva (1998), and Kulasuriya (1978)

conventional practice in Sri Lanka as much as in India, for this tendency enters the caste histories of the middle period as well, notably in the *Janavamsa* of the 15th century.[4]

The chronological, state-centred story form of the *Mahâvamsa* attracted British administrators and European scholars once the chronicle was made available in translated form in the course of the 19th century. As the remarkable ruins of the ancient Sinhala civilisation were uncovered, they added to the authenticity of the *Mahâvamsa*. These ruins were captured on canvas and image by painters and photographers and gazed at in awe by a wide range of personnel from different backgrounds, whether Sinhala-Ceylonese or other Ceylonese (Sri Lankans), or even Europeans. Thus, the aura of past greatness associated with these ruins validated the self-perceptions of those Sinhalese[5] who were attentive to their heritage through modern as well as more traditional oral and visual modes of cultural transmission.

In the English writings on this subject, therefore, 'Ceylonese civilisation' and 'Sinhalese civilisation' could merge or overlap in significant ways. In the context of colonial subordination, such evidence of past greatness invigorated individuals from all the indigenous communities, including Tamils and Burghers.[6] Retrospective romanticism, as we know, has inspired many a nationalism and in this instance both the ruins of the Rajarata civilisation and the existence of annals with a chronology attached to political dynasts provided solid foundations for many a Ceylonese nationalist who wished to dwell on past glories.

It would be erroneous, however, to follow Benedict Anderson and the post-Orientalists in seeing this attention to the past as an innovation associated with print technology and print capitalism (Anderson 1991; Rogers 1994). Attention to custom and to the heroes of past time feature

[4] See Nevill (1886) and Roberts (1982. 20–21). In my thinking, 'the middle period' refers to the era 1232–1815. This terminology displaces the concept 'medieval'.

[5] In recent years, inspired, it seems, by influential scholars in USA, the word 'Sinhalese' has been rendered as 'Sinhalas' in some academic writings. This is technically correct, but is indicative of a purist position For that reason I prefer the original rendering and am fortified by the style of the journal *Prawâda* in sticking to this older pattern I will be using the form 'Sinhala' for adjectival renderings or in reference to the language.

I also advocate the use of hyphenated labels, such as Burgher-Lankan and Sinhala-Lankan, in order to counteract the unreflexive habit among some Sinhalese today of equating 'Sinhalese' with 'Sri Lankan' in hegemonic fashion. Hyphenated labels will also permit one to distinguish Tamil-Lankans from Tamil-Eelamists, Tamil-Indians, Tamil-Fijians, Tamil-Australians, and so on.

[6] Thus, Ponnambalam Arunachalam had visions of Ceylon 'emulat[ing her] great past' (notes from his diary of 1903 taken by James T. Rutnam)

prominently in the cultural productions of the Kingdom of Kandy (more properly, *Sinhalê* or *Sinhalaya*), the last state associated with Sinhala civilisation (1590s to 1815). The hero-king Dutugämunu is referred to in at least one of the 17th-century war poems (*Râjasîha Hatana*, v. 33 [1968]). Several of the letters from the King of Kandy to the British authorities located in Colombo begin with the putative founding father of the Sinhala line of dynasts: 'From the great King Vijaya, born of the noble exceeding pure Race of the Sun ....'[7] A previous letter not only commenced with a similar ornate reference to Vijaya, but also proceeded to refer to Dutugämunu's defeat of the 'Seyde Malabars' (filthy and wicked Tamils).[8] It then moved chronologically to refer to the Chola invasions, Parakrama Bahu of Polonnaru, Parakrama Bahu of Dambadeni and Parakrama Bahu of Kotte, the advent of the Portuguese and the manner in which the King of Kandy set up the Dutch as 'the guardians of the coast'.[9]

Such readings of the past, as well as the weight attached to the political icons of distant time, have to be interpreted within the cosmological perspective of the Sinhala peoples and their elites in that era. The Kandyan ruling classes, for instance, had the following conviction:

> Besides, not only the English Host, although the Dutch, French, Caffre, and many other foreign Hosts united should come and make War against the happy Isle of Lanka, most assuredly they cannot conquer. That is for no other Cause, (but) by the Power of the Gods called Vishnu, Sumana, Karttika, Wibhisana, who protect the entire Religion of Srighana [the Buddha], and by the Power of the Fortunes of our God and Lord Supreme....[10]

In brief, the forces of the cosmos would assist them in maintaining their sovereignty.

[7] Pusvalla Ralahamy to John D'Oyly, 29 June 1812, in CO 54/44, pp 344–46, and Ahalepola to D'Oyly, 8 February 1812, encl. in Wilson to Liverpool, 26 February 1812 in CO 54/42, pp. 47–51.

[8] 'Malabars' was the term used by the Dutch and the British to refer to all South Indians and, by extension, all those of putative southern Indian stock in the island, including those whom the Sinhalese identified as Damila or Demala (that is, Tamil). In another letter that followed, the Kandyan court used the phrase 'Seyde Demala'. The misspelt 'Seyde' refers to *sadi* or *hädi*, a polysemic term meaning wicked, fierce or unruly on the one hand, or filthy or dirty on the other (see Carter 1996: 675; Dharmadasa 1992b: 46–47; Obeyesekere 1993: 152; and Pieris 1909: v. 31, 38).

[9] Ahalepola to D'Oyly, 27 November 1811, encl. in Wilson–Liverpool, 26 February 1812, CO 54/42, pp. 47–51.

[10] Ahälepola to D'Oyly, 27 November 1811, encl. in Wilson–Liverpool, 26 February 1812, CO 54/42, pp. 47–51.

Obeyesekere (1995: 235) has indicated that the Sinhala literati and those associated with the state in the pre-colonial era had familiarity with conceptions of sovereignty. This is clearly indicated in one of Râjasinha II's letters to the Dutch at that stage in history when the Kingdom of Kandy was in alliance with the Dutch in a project to oust the Portuguese from the littoral territories they held. Râjasinha informed the Dutch governor in 1658 that he, Râjasinha, 'was no longer King of *Kanda Uda Rata*, the Country above the Mountains, alone, but of *Sinhale*, the Country of the Sinhalese, including nearly a moiety of the *Pata Rata*, the Country below, which had belonged to Kotte'.[11] Thus, in the series of letters exchanged in the period 1638–58, Râjasinha referred to the Dutch as 'my vassals' and used such phrases as 'these my realms', 'these lowland territories of mine' and 'this Empire of Ceilao' (Ferguson 1904: 236, 202, 190, 194, 227).

What one sees here, then, is a particular species of political authority, one directed by the ideas of tributary overlordship associated with the *mandala* concept and the centre-oriented states of South and Southeast Asia.[12] Critical to these notions are historical interpretations that I conceptualise as 'cosmological', that is, readings of the world in religious and symbolic ways that are at odds with the secular, rationalist and empiricist historiography of modern times.

Despite the ruling elite's faith in the invincibility of their kingdom, internal divisions enabled British military power to overwhelm the Kingdom of Kandy in the years 1815 to 1818. The question arises, therefore, to what extent and in what ways the cosmological readings of the past, present and future of the pre-British era remained as lines of thought, or more contemporary re-workings, during the new institutional order ushered in by the British in the 19th century. Such a question cannot be answered in an article-length study. However, this essay will reveal facets of the contemporary re-workings among Sinhala activists whose lines of thinking I deem to be chauvinist.

I
The British transformation

The British era of colonialism was transformative in fundamental ways. The radical changes in the ordering of society were at once institutional

[11] Paul E. Pieris's paraphrase (1999: 5).

[12] The concept of 'tributary overlordship' is more fully developed in Roberts (2001). It is based on material in Abeyasinghe (1984–85) and (1985–86), as well as Duncan (1990). The *mandala* concept, translated as 'a galactic polity', is developed in Tambiah (1985).

and ideological. The island was unified through a formal, rational bureaucratic framework that was supported by more rapid forms of communication involving an infrastructure of roads, bridges, railways and postal and telegraphic communications as well as a capitalist form of market exchange expressly engineered through a series of legislative acts. These practices were of ideological import and directed by an either/or epistemology, that is, by an emphasis on precision, clarity of distinction and rational ordering of exchanges. In brief, one could say with the post-Orientalists that a new intellectual framework had been implanted within the island or was in the process of being consolidated (Rogers 1994). In these circumstances, those who identified themselves as Mohammedan,[13] Tamil, Sinhalese, Burgher, et cetera, came into relation with each other in new ways.

Not least among these developments was the capacity for Tamils from the north to move south in significant numbers for employment without being absorbed into the Sinhala order in the manner that appears to have prevailed in the middle period (1232–1815), a period when immigrants from southern India were gradually indigenised as Vāddas[14] or Sinhalese (except in Yālppanam where the process involved the Tamilisation of Sinhala-speakers). At the same time the plantation economy encouraged a significant number of Tamils from India to migrate to Ceylon as plantation workers, port workers, horse keepers and other menial labourers from the 1830s right through till the 1930s. These migrants were identified as Indian Tamils, in distinction from the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Tamils. More recently, they have been described as 'Plantation Tamils' or 'Malaiyâha Tamils'.

In effect, the multi-ethnic character of the island's society was accentuated at the same time that the differentiation took on sharper, more rigid, dimensions. These distinctions were sustained by caste endogamy within the Tamil structure of caste and a parallel set of endogamous

[13] The term 'Mohammedan' was used in English writing, often in synonymous overlap with the label 'Moors', till about the 1930s, when 'Muslim' replaced it. In so far as the word 'Moor' was used interchangeably with 'Mohammedan' in both the spoken and written forms of communication by members of that community, the British and others during the early 20th century, I was forced to adopt the artefact 'Mohammedan Moors' (as distinct from 'Malays') when I wrote articles on the 1915 pogrom that victimised these people (Roberts 1994: chaps. 7 and 8).

[14] The original autochthonous hunter-gatherer peoples in Sinhala mythological and historical stories. The Vāddas of the 20th century have been sedentary for some time and are gradually becoming Sinhalese or Tamil. One should not too readily assume that these remnants are direct lineal descendants of the Vaddas of the first millennium A.D. It is possible that Sinhala-speakers became Vadda over the centuries.

practices among the Sinhala castes. Thus, it is critical to note that the transformations of the British colonial order were not root and branch. At the level of ideology as well as practice, hierarchical notions of respect and status, caste notions, ideas of kingship, shame, karmic retribution, beliefs in the power of astrological forces, supernatural interventions, sorcery and jealousy, a valorisation of largesse and religious devotion, coparcenary rights in minute land-shares[15]—all these (and more) were among the facets of the old order that were re-worked and reproduced under the new dispensation.

The older modalities of communication through the oral transmissions of stories, ritual and other dramatic performances, temple paintings and sculptural images were critical to these re-castings of the British era. In other other words, print technology worked alongside these vehicles of ideological transmission during the modernisation of the 19th and 20th centuries. The Sinhala and Sinhala Buddhist nationalisms of the British period, as well as of the post-colonial era, have been promoted by multiple modalities of communication that influence each other and work intertextually. To concentrate on the written form is to undervalue the power of the oral and the visual (including body language, dress styles, iconic and architectural preferences) in shaping ideology. Thus, I would argue speculatively that such figures as Vijaya, Dutugàmunu and Râjasinha II have been (and are) cultural heroes among the illiterate as much as among the literati of the modern era.

This said, it must be stressed that the principal proponents of Sinhala nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries have been drawn from classes that emerged newly as society was reshaped by the capitalist bureaucratic framework of the British era. The overlapping categories of the bourgeoisie and middle class on the one hand, and the intermediary categories constituted by the petit-bourgeoisie and local elites on the other, have been at the centre of the political movements originating in the Sinhala-speaking areas (usually the south-western districts) during these centuries.

In the Tamil-speaking areas there seem to have been at least two streams of recollection, strands that may well have overlapped with each other. On the one hand were folkloric traditions, especially strong among the peoples on the eastern littoral,[16] which retained an emphasis

[15] The listing should not be treated as exhaustive, but is adequate proof that the British order was *not* totally transformative.

[16] This note is based on conversations with Sid Pennpanayagam and Taraki. I have no concrete evidence to support this suggestion—the references in the next citation being pertinent to southern India

on heritage in the manner associated with *bhakti* religiosity. Illustrations are afforded by the stories of the sixty-three Tamil Saivite *tontars* (servitors) described in the 12th-century *Periya Purânam*, or such individuals as Kattabomman, a local chieftain in Tirunelveli district who resisted the British in the 1790s.[17] On the other hand were the more classical Sanskritic ideologies of Saiva Siddhanta embodied in the work of Arumugam Navalar (1822–79). Seeking to strengthen Tamil Hindu society against the threat of Christianity and Westernisation, Navalar emphasised the high culture of Tamil tradition. In this quest the 19th-century links with southern India and the new University of Madras seem to have been an important inspiration. As such, the Tamil-ness espoused by the people of the Jaffna Peninsula during the British period appears to have been suffused by the hold of the dominant Vellala caste and valorised knowledge in both high Tamilian and high Western forms.[18]

In contrast, the social basis of Sinhala and/or Sinhala Buddhist nationalist expressions had deeper and wider support in the class order, though there was limited Kandyan Sinhalese involvement till the 1920s. Here, the Buddhist revitalisation movement dating from the 1860s, and a multifaceted series of activities from about the same time seeking to protect Sinhala culture from the threat of Westernisation, together mark the unfolding of a Sinhala-ness centred on the *jâtiya*, its *kulacharitra* and its *gunadharma* (race/nation, customs and values). Christian Sinhalese were among those involved in several of these activities, so one has to be attentive to both the overlaps and the distinctions between Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and Sinhala nationalism.[19] This situation is further complicated by the fact that some of those attentive to Sinhala culture were also ardent Ceylonese nationalists and placed their Sinhala-ness within this overarching trans-ethnic category in a confederative scheme of affiliation (Roberts 1997b: 272–86).

[17] Ramaswamy (1994: 297–315) and Hudson (1990). Also see Blackburn (1985); Shulman (1986), and Vamadeva (1995).

[18] My tentative synthesis is derived from Bastin (1997: 394–400, 407–9), Hellman-Rajanayagam (1989, 1992, 1994a and 1994b), and Thamnayagam (1963).

[19] The academic writings on the ethnic conflict over the last two decades, including notable works by Obeyesekere and Tambiah, have invariably focused on 'Sinhala Buddhist' identity. This label neglects the sentiments of the Sinhala Christian population, perhaps 7 per cent of the Sinhala-speakers. In so far as this neglect has been consistent, and is then imprinted in the label 'Sinhala Buddhist', the implications are unfortunate in that they de-emphasis the ideological foundations that forge a Sinhala-ness disassociated from Buddhism *qua* Buddhism.

Previous writings on this subject have been constrained by a focus on written expressions in print or the expressions of the dramatic theatre centred on Tower Hall in the suburb of Maradâna in Colombo. But Sinhala thinking from the mid-19th to the late 20th centuries was also moulded by the messages embodied in oral stories, ritual performances and visual images. Malalgoda has called our attention to expressions of Buddhist millenarian hopes in opposition to the British order in the first half of the 19th century in several regions of the old Kandyan territory, and to similar traces in the 1880s in Kegalle district. The latter movement sought to 'restore Buddhism to its pristine purity' under the guidance of a 'Prince of Righteousness' whose advent would result in 'all foreigners and heretics vanish[ing] away'.[20] This act of protest seems to have been associated with the palm-leaf document, the *Sumana Sûtraya*, that anticipated the restoration of the proper order by a King Vîrapoga, whose reign would be followed by a forty-year period of darkness due to Tamil invasions, a state of decline that would be dispelled by King Diyasêna (Malalgoda 1970: 437). Likewise, we know that on occasion the mantle of Diyasêna, a messianic figure in Sinhalese folkore, was attached to such populist leaders as Goonesinha and Bandaranaike in the 20th century.[21]

This imagery suggests that folk traditions sustained traces of millenarian fantasy. I have been drawn to the political significance of these traces by the 'discovery' that even today there is a lively folk tradition around such figures as Râjasinha I, Râjasinha II, Dutugâmunu and Vijaya; and that some of the popular vendors of such tales have been illiterate people of working-class status.[22] It is my speculation that the work of *kavi kola* and *kâlâ patra* (broadsides in printed verse and satirical lampoons) in the political propaganda of the 20th century was empowered by a circuit of oral tales on similar lines that existed in parallel with these written sheets.

These fragmentary traces gain in significance when one considers that the idea of kingship remains alive in some contemporary villages (Brow 1996: 84–85; Obeyesekere 1967: 221–22) and that kings feature

[20] The British district officer's words as quoted by Malalgoda (1970: 437).

[21] Re Goonesinha, see *Vîrayâ*, 27 November 1929. Re Bandaranaike, I rely on a personal communication received some time ago from G. Obeyesekere.

[22] This comment is based on conversations with Sandadas Coperahewa, Srinath Ganewatte and Ananda Wakkumbura. The latter, now aged circa 60, was born and bred in Sabaragamuva, but has profound and regionally widespread knowledge of grassroots culture derived from his political work as a radical activist of socialist persuasion.

prominently in onomastic stories explaining how specific place names originated (Winslow 1984). That someone somewhere during the late British period should assume the mantle of a poet of the Kandy period and assemble the *Mandârampura Puvata* as if it were a Kandyan text (Malalgoda 1999) indicates an abiding antiquarian interest. Speculatively, I suggest that one of the institutional forces providing a site for a continuous emphasis on the old kingly order has been the Sangha, the order of *bhikkhus*.[23]

It is within these circumstances, therefore, that one must consider the resonances attached to the conventional versions of the Vijaya story and the conventional picture of Dutugämunu as a warrior hero who evicted Tamil invaders from the land. These are among the facets of collective memory that provide the foundations for the pervasive belief among so many Sinhalese today that their ancient forefathers were the original civilisational force in the island's history. When individual Sinhalese claim that the Sinhalese were the 'original inhabitants',[24] their beliefs are founded on such tales from the *vasma* traditions that have been reproduced in folklore, as well as on the supposedly authoritative 'history' in modern educational texts. In other words, these beliefs serve as powerful legitimation devices. For many spokespersons from within the Sinhala majority, the recollection of their sovereign presence in the island becomes the bedrock of their contemporary majoritarian ideology. This ideology carries hegemonic implications, especially when the term 'Sinhalese' equates with, and thereby subsumes, the term 'Ceylonese' or 'Lankan' (Roberts 2000c).

This tendency has encouraged Tamil scholar-patriots to engage in historical writings in the same strain, developing political history in the same empirical, chronological manner to counteract the Sinhala claims. Thus, one writer asserts that the 'Tamils were the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka' by fusing them with the Nâgas and Yakshas of the *Mahâbhârata* and *Râmâyana*. Another claims that the 'Dravidians were in

[23] It is striking that in one of the wondrous dreams recorded in his diary in 1947 by a forest dwelling *bhikkhu* known as Nânânada Thera, the leading politician of the time, D S. Senanayake, appeared as an image that was 'like a king' with a retinue in train (Carrithers 1983: 185–86)

[24] A few years back President Chandrika Kumaratunga set a cat among the pigeons when she made this claim as part of her rhetoric during an official visit to South Africa. Since she is by no means a chauvinist, her comment indicates the extent to which this idea is accepted in a taken-for-granted way in Sri Lanka among Sinhalese (as well as others). The vociferous chorus of opposition to this view from Tamil circles, globally and in Sri Lanka, demonstrates the degree to which 'history' is a site of battle.

Ceylon before Vijaya and his followers' (Ponnambalam 1983: 2, 16–18; Ponniah 1963: 2–3). As a result, one has a battle over ancient history played out today in rationalist and empiricist terms. Scholar-patriots assail each other as they attempt to establish their claims to the *urspriingliche* moment of conception. The fact that some of the reconstructions are built on poor empirical foundations and pathetic reasoning should not obscure the seriousness of the argument and the empiricist epistemology that sustains the effort.

Confronting this situation, what can be said? First, one can suggest that the written empirical data on the first millennium B.C. are so scanty that to engage in such ideological struggles is to box with mist. Second, one must note that Buddhism was widely prevalent among the Tamil-speakers of southern India during the last two or three centuries B.C., while the Brahmi inscriptions in Sri Lanka dating from around the 2nd century B.C. were in a script identified as 'Old Prakrit', 'Sinhalese Prakrit' or 'Proto-Sinhala'. This script evolved into the Sinhala script by the 8th and 9th centuries A.D., if not earlier (Gunawardana 1995: 10–19; also Kulasuriya 1990; Mendis 1965). In the third place, one must enter a cautionary caveat. The empirical data being gathered by foreign archaeological teams and such relatively non-partisan archaeologists as Siran Deraniyagala and Sudharshan Seneviratne, together with the historical speculations arising from this material, will eventually unfold a picture of the millennium B.C. that will revolutionise the existing framework. But the fruits of such labour unfold at a snail's pace. Until then, what can be said?

In a polemical newspaper article meant to provoke, and deliberately entitled 'History as dynamite',[25] I recently argued that the Vijaya story is a genesis story rather than empirical fact, and that the Sinhala/Tamil conflict that surrounds the tale of Dutugämunu is a reading of the 5th/6th century situation of Mahânâma's (*bhikkhu* author of *Mahâvamsa*) time backwards into the 2nd century B.C. In effect, I was stating that the categorical opposition between Sinhalese and Tamil peoples in the centuries B.C. has little foundation, and that Elâra may not have been a Tamil dynast, let alone a Hindu one. My line of reasoning here was ostensibly empirical. It was deliberately cast in this form so as to draw fire.

V.K. Wickramasinghe, a retired government administrator with a background in the discipline of economics, was sufficiently angered to respond at length (*Island*, 27, 28 and 29 April 2000). Little is said in his

[25] *Island, Special Millennium 2000 issue*, 1 January 2000, pp. 33–34. Also reprinted in *Pravâda* 6: 11–13. A more sophisticated and theoretical argument on these lines can be found in David Scott (1999: chap 4).

article about either Vijaya or Dutugämunu or their contexts. A substantial part of his essay is directed towards outlining developments during the British period which are said to have disadvantaged the Sinhalese and enabled numerous Tamils to secure gainful employment in localities outside their domains. In this view, my attempt to debunk the Vijaya and Dutugämunu stories 'is a pointless gimmick' that glosses over such facts and hides 'the need for a strong unitary state to ensure the right of individuals [from all communities] to live anywhere in this island homeland'. Wickramasinghe then adds: 'Thus the ancient and medieval history of Sri Lanka is of direct relevance because *it is very clear from its history that it has been an unitary state from very early times* [emphasis mine]'. Behind his sharp response to my essay is an ardent opposition to what he regards as the 'uncompromising chauvinism' of the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi party (the Tamil name of party that presented itself to the English-speaking world in 1949 as the 'Federal Party') set up by Chelvanayagam. As marked by the *Island* newspapers' captions, Wickramasinghe's response is also a retort directed against my advocacy of 'a confederated consociation of nationalities' as a step towards a resolution of the present conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil parties.

It would not be difficult to challenge Wickramasinghe's essay through a species of empiricist reasoning. But that would miss the point of the exercise that I initiated. Wickramasinghe's empiricist methods are impelled by a deep emotional attachment to the lineaments of Sinhala history outlined in the chronicles. He is aware of this in some measure, for he notes at the outset—correctly in my view—that 'myths and legends are a cohesive force influencing the cultures of different peoples'. It is the centrality of Vijaya, Dutugämunu and others within the submerged cosmological strand of Wickramasinghe's reasoning that I address here, for I see his thinking as a window to the worldview of those Sinhalese who are ardently hostile to any devolutionary steps that undermine centralised structures of rule favouring the majority. Indeed, since writing the initial memorandum that has been transformed into this article,[26] my speculation on this point has been confirmed by the vigorous platform espoused by a new party, the Sïhala Urumaya (Sinhalese Heritage), led by a leading lawyer named S.L. Gunasekera.[27]

[26] Entitled 'The weight of history', this was a think-piece for discussions organised by the Marga Research Institute and directed towards ethnic reconciliation.

[27] See the series of items on the Sïhala Urumaya in the *Island* (a newspaper that is partial to the stance taken by this party) in August–October 2000, especially Gunasekera (2000a, b and c) and Jayasundere (2000).

Since Wickramasinghe does not elaborate on this strand within his reasoning, one has to reach for conclusions speculatively. Godfrey Gunatilleke (1999) provides us with a critical insight. His insight is embodied in reflections on the religious and symbolic dimensions of the Vijaya story in the course of a friendly, albeit critical, engagement with my initial memorandum. These thoughts were guided by his background in English literature as well as by his involvement in the world of English and Sinhala theatre productions in Sri Lanka. In effect, an aesthetic capacity nourished what I take to be a visionary reading on his part that is as politically creative as it is potentially useful. It runs thus:

> The historical fixations of a community are analogous to the psycho-pathological conditions in an individual's life. When the movement to the future is obstructed by inability to adjust and overcome present problems, there is a regression to the past which begins to overpower and hold the present captive to the emotional states and fears of the past.

Suspicious though I am of psychological reasoning, this suggestion seems germane to our understanding of the mentalities that motivate the type of thinking seen in Wickramasinghe's article.

By itself, though, this statement is inadequate. What gives Gunatilleke's suggestion force is his sensitivity to the 'religious and symbolic meanings' within the Vijaya and Dutugämunu stories. This sensitivity enables him to interpret the Vijaya story not as empirical fact, but as a message regarding the genesis of a civilisational culture and its associated form of statehood:

> To me the myth of Sinhabâhu and Vijaya has a powerful and unique symbolism. It depicts the violent transition from a condition of brute nature to a primary human condition. This has to occur through a tragic act of parricide of the brute father. This is the primal Freudian drama set in a context of humanisation and liberation. As in a Greek tragedy the spiral of violence must continue through Vijaya whom the father has to exile for his criminality and who must create his new kingdom through treachery and the abandonment of his consort and his children. Thereafter Vijaya gives up 'his evil ways' and reigns righteously. This is the pre-Buddhist state before the conversion, before the preaching of the Dhamma which begins with the sermon on 'spiritual calm'.

Thus, in this reading, the Vijaya tale is a story of brutality and wild disorder being converted to humanity and the political order of a state. This sets the scene for the subsequent consolidation of humane orderliness through the conversion of the people of the island to the Dhammic message of the Buddha, the all-compassionate one.[28]

Likewise, Gunatilleke observes that there are many images of Dutugämunu in the *Mahâvamsa*: 'the triumphant warrior; the victor stricken with Asokan grief over those slain in the war; the righteous king who ordained that no work be done for the Lohâpasâda without the "work being appraised and wages being paid"; the monarch who had scruples about levying taxes to build the Great Stupa; the dying king who said that "all his benevolence while he reigned did not gladden his heart, only the two gifts he gave without care for his life while he was in adversity..." gave him solace; who after death becomes the first disciple of the Maitreya Buddha'.

Gunatilleke's perceptive analysis is reminiscent of the approach of the 18th-century Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico. As clarified by Berlin, Vico held that the conventional forms of knowledge, whether '*a priori*-deductive' or '*a-posteriori*-empirical', have to be supplemented by analytical approaches involving 'reconstructive imagination'. 'This method of discovery ... begins with understanding the means of expression [among the people under survey] and seeks to reach the vision of reality which they presuppose and articulate.' It calls for 'a kind of transcendental deduction ... of historical truth' (Berlin 1976: xix).

Such sensitive readings of ardent Sinhalese recollections of their past mark the route that one must take today if some form of political accommodation is to be secured within Sri Lanka. This dismissive manner in which secular, rationalist scholars respond to the mythologised readings of the past (cf. Scott 1999: chap. 4) only alienate and sponsor chauvinist fundamentalism in opposition to their own forms of extreme secularism. It is not necessary to expunge Vijaya in the manner implied in my essay on 'History as dynamite'. Rather, Gunatilleke's path of interpretation opens the possibility of limiting and bracketing the myths of the past, in so far as he recognises their relevance for many contemporary Sinhalese by contributing to their values and serving as an anchorage for their collective being.

But such a line of interpretation must also mark the considerable ingress of immigrant peoples, commodities, supernatural icons and

[28] Though the words are mine, the latter section is a paraphrase of Gunatilleke's 'Comments' (1999) on my 'History as dynamite' paper

religious practices during the two millennia A.D., the long periods of peaceful co-existence between various communities in the island's past, and the rich syncretisms that have developed. It must also insist that the principles of political allegiance and lordship in the pre-British era were, for the most part, quite distinct from the present global order. This means that such concepts as 'an unitary framework', 'unitarianism', 'federalism' and 'separation of powers' make no sense for that context.[29] In other words, one must not extend modern political concepts to the ancient and middle periods of Lankan history. The corollary is that those attached to Sinhala-ness via recollections of the past and its symbolic moments should recognise that their circumstances have altered radically, and that a specific multi-ethnic society is firmly in place. Without jettisoning their cherished symbols, they must move towards 'a reasoned liberation from the past' (Gunatilleke's words).

Such re-interpretations of their past, and a readiness among Sinhala activists to abandon claims to majoritarian supremacy based on primordial originality will hopefully enable Tamil and other non-Sinhala scholar-patriots to disengage themselves from their combative historical warfare. Perhaps it would *then* be easier for Tamils to accept the historical evidence that indicates that the state civilisation in the first millennium A.D. was predominantly Sinhalese in complexion, and that the religio-symbolic mythology of the *vamsa* chronicles is meaningful for the collective identity of the Sinhalese today. Once the worth of their respective pasts is identified and recorded as meaningful to the Tamils and the Sinhalese, *then, and perhaps only then*, the respective protagonists may be able to discard their battles over history and address their contemporary differences. Some considered bracketing and re-working of past symbolic moments appears to be a necessary foundation for a movement to the immediate future beyond the tragedies of the present.

II

From Wickramasinghe to the Sîhala Urumaya

V.K. Wickramasinghe is a man of the Southern Province who was educated at St. Thomas's College, Mount Lavinia. Trained as an economist,

[29] For instance, note D.G.B de Silva's (2000) and Seneviratne's (1999) notes on a picture of Gnanissara Thera's lamp-lighting ceremony. Though de Silva begins with a caution against the extension of contemporary concepts into the past, his rather confusing article does deploy the idea of *ekacchatra* (unitarian) in its outline of the medieval political order.

he is now retired after serving the government. As one of Martin Wickramasinghe's sons he has presumably imbibed his father's profound engagement with the Sinhala cultural heritage.[30] I speculate that Wickramasinghe, as a person who emerged into voting age at some point in the 1940s, is deeply sympathetic to the two abiding streams of value associated with the socio-political transformations effected in the year 1956, namely, the process of democratisation of opportunity on the one hand, and the cultural resurgence of the Sinhala-speakers on the other.

For these reasons I do not consider his views idiosyncratic. I go further and link his position with that of the Sīhala Urumaya, a new party that emerged with considerable fanfare in late April 2000 and that contested the general elections of October 2000. I am not saying that Wickramasinghe voted for the Sīhala Urumaya. Rather, his position overlaps with that of the Sīhala Urumaya along two dimensions. For one, several key personnel in the initial Sīhala Urumaya were economists with Ph.D.s, and the leading lights were mostly retired bureaucrats, judges, lawyers and university professors of the same generation as Wickramasinghe, that is, those who had entered voting age in the 1940s and 1950s. In the second place, the key plank of the Sīhala Urumaya has been the preservation of a unitary state and the rejection of devolution.

Thus, its manifesto states that it is committed 'to crush[ing] northern terrorism by military force and [to bringing] the whole country *under the rule of one law* which applies to people of all races and communities' (*Sunday Island*, 17 September 2000, emphasis mine), while S.L. Gunasekera deployed his legal skills in vigorously elaborating on this line of argument (2000b and 2000c). This emphasis is compounded by the complaint that the 'Sinhala people ... have been reduced to the status of a minority'.[31] Thus, Gunasekera argued that 'the two major parties [the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party] are ... composed of people who are Sinhalese in name but *not Sinhalese at heart*' (2000c, emphasis mine). It was this failure, in the reasoning of the Sīhala Urumaya, which had resulted in the Sinhalese being held to ransom by 'the forces of Tamil and Muslim chauvinism'.[32] The grievances

[30] Martin Wickramasinghe (1891–1976) was a famous Sinhala novelist whose works engaged in social commentary. Wickramasinghe was secular in orientation and possessed multilingual skills. His novels have been translated into numerous languages. See M. Wickramasinghe (1973) for a glimpse of his perspective. Note the selection of photographs.

[31] 'SU presents its manifesto', *Island*, 17 September 2000.

[32] The latter phrase was used on at least three occasions in Gunasekera (2000b).

levelled at contemporary Tamil and Muslim political interests were coupled with the assertion that, with the exception of the lands controlled by the Tigers, 'in all other parts of the country the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and other races live in perfect peace and harmony' (Gunasekera 2000c).

In my preliminary studies of the written, public representations of the Sīhala Urumaya in the English medium, I have found no explicit references to Vijaya, Dutugämunu or other Sinhala hero-kings of the past. A fuller understanding of the ideological imperatives and thought processes of this party must necessarily explore their outpourings in the Sinhala medium, not only in print and wall-graffiti, but also those expressed verbally on public platforms and through limericks and house-to-house canvassing. From its inception, the Sīhala Urumaya has been a disparate body with at least two 'wings', the older, bilingual professional upper-middle-class strand of supporters around Gunasekera on the one hand, and, on the other, the younger, sharper-tongued, Sinhala-proficient personnel around Champika Ranawake.[33] I focus here on the former, the relatively moderate stream of the Sīhala Urumaya. If primordialist and hardline elements of ideology can be discerned within this wing, it is doubly significant. One can be fairly certain that the emphasis on Sinhala history and its foundational claims will be an entrenched feature of the virulent indigenist forces within Ranawake's wing of the Sīhala Urumaya. And they are more likely to press this argument in public.[34] However, it is when the assumptions underlying an ideological position are not overt that they are the most insidious in their power.

Though the more moderate wing of the Sīhala Urumaya does not seem to have dwelt on the foundation myths of the Sinhala people in their English representations during the election campaign, I contend that the figure of Vijaya and the belief that this is a Sinhala country from its civilisational point of origin underpin their thinking—just as they sustain the reasoning of V.K. Wickramasinghe.

[33] As an engineering student Ranawake was in the higher echelons of the JVP in 1987–89 and was saved from execution by the editor of the newspaper *Rāvaya*. Today, Ranawake is a fiery orator in Sinhala. Of all the SU candidates at the elections, he secured the most votes.

[34] The image of Dutugamunu certainly enters some of their speech-mongering. On one occasion Ranawake introduced the (mythical) image of Puttābhaya, the Buddhist monk who, as the mythologised story tells us, disrobed and became one of the giant warriors assisting Dutugämunu in his campaign to evict the Tamils (telephone conversation with Ananda Wakkumbura in Colombo, 22 November 2000, and e-mail note, 14 November 2000).

Take S.L. Gunasekera's belief that the Sinhala leaders of the UNP and the People's Alliance led by the SLFP are 'not Sinhalese at heart'. This is nothing less than the claim that the latter are traitors to the cause. The inference is that these leaders are '*a-sinhala*', that is, un-Sinhala in the same sense as 'un-American' in the American political vocabulary. Significantly, in his oration at the founding moment, Gunasekera referred to the 'sons of the soil' in the course of a speech that also castigated the other parties for their 'betrayal' (*Island*, 28 April 2000). 'Sons of the soil', the English version of the *bhumiputra* concept, was a favourite concept in the vocabulary of the ardent Sinhala revivalist, Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), a figure who has been adopted as a kind of patron-god by the movement of Sinhala cultural nationalism since the 1940s.[35]

In arguing for a single framework of law and opposing federal schemes, Gunasekera used the principle of equality rather than historical occupation as his pillar of legitimation. Every citizen of whatever 'race', he insisted, has a right to property and mobility in any region of Sri Lanka, the understanding being that devolution would juridically compromise this principle. Within this egalitarian emphasis, Gunasekera did not hesitate to use the same principle of equality to attach primacy to the Sinhalese because of their majoritarian weight. This was democracy, he said. Where a conflict of interest developed between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, 'the will of the Sinhalese must prevail because 12% or 18% [could] never be *equal* to 74%' (2000c, emphasis mine).

Though the claims of the Sīhala Urumaya were (and remain) set out explicitly on the ground that the Sinhalese make up 74 per cent of the population today, I speculate that a belief in the age-old historical foundations of Buddhism and Sinhala civilisation provides the backdrop to these claims and functions as a legitimating idea. A faint trace of this reasoning is found in the following statement in the SU manifesto:

> On religion, culture and heritage, SU states that this is a Sinhala Buddhist country whose culture, value system, history and pattern of life has been based on the Buddha Dhamma for over *2500 years*. Despite this background there has been no discrimination or persecution of the people of any race community or religion [emphasis mine].

[35] On Dharmapala, see Obeyesekere (1993), Roberts (1997a) and Seneviratne (1999). Note that his speeches and writings were printed in both English and Sinhala in large volumes sponsored by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in the 1960s.

'2500 years' is a key sign in the primordial notions of ordinary Sinhalese. It is also significant for those not-so-ordinary: no less a person than Arjuna Ranatunga pulled this valued sign out of the hat when he responded to Shane Warne's verbal assassination of his character in mid-1999 during the lead-up to the World Cup in cricket. In retaliation, Ranatunga contrasted the shallow ancestry of Australians with Sri Lanka's '2000 years of history'.[36] Typically, the policy declaration of yet another association, the Sinhala Veera Vidahana, began with the statement that 'the Sinhalese have a history of over 2500 years' when it appeared on the political scene on 7 July 1995.[37]

Such symbolic vocabulary—sons of the soil, 2,500 (or 2,000) years, 'true Sinhalese',[38] et cetera—in the expressions of the Sīhala Urumaya gain weight when juxtaposed with the title that the founding fathers of the party chose for themselves: the 'Heritage of the Sinhalese (or Sinhalas)'. *Uru* in Pali and Sanskrit means 'excellent' and 'eminent',[39] while *urumaya* is clarified thus in Sinhala–Sinhala dictionaries: (*a*) *pâramparika ayitiya*, generational right or claim; (*b*) *himikama*, ownership or possession; (*c*) *keneku gê maranayen pasu anikukata pâvarena ohugê dêpala nilatala âdiya*, the properties and chattels that are transferable as inheritance after the death of the person who owns them.[40]

As such, *urumaya* has ramifying implications in the everyday world of the Sinhalese, most notably during that commonplace event, the land dispute. Because of its associations with inheritances it is likely that

[36] Seeking to curry favour with the Australian public, the Federation of Tamil Associations in Australia immediately accused Ranatunga of 'racism'. I do not have references to these items, but they are common knowledge among cricket buffs.

[37] See relevant segment in www.sinhale.org. Sinhala Veera Vidahana (SVV) can be rendered formally as 'Triumphant Sinhala Heroes', or more usefully as the 'Brigade of the Sinhala Destroyers' or 'Sinhala Heroes' Forum' It is an organisation of Sinhala businessmen, who wish to reduce the power of Tamils and Muslims in the world of retail and wholesale business. It was initiated on 5 July 1995.

Unlike S.L. Gunasekera, the SVV is unabashed in proclaiming the following three principles as the first of its priorities: (*a*) 'Sinhalê ... must be restored and with it a sense of national identity'; (*b*) 'Recognition of the Sinhalese as the definitive race of the country on the basis of universal principle of so recognizing in any country that race which created its civilisation'; and (*c*) 'Other races to be recognized as ethnic groups in the country of Sinhale.'

[38] The term *saba sinhalayo* was used in Sinhala by Mahes Atapattu, an SU candidate in Kalutara district (information from *Divaina* supplied by Ananda Wakkumbura).

[39] E-mail memo from Timan Frasch, Südasien Institut, Heidelberg University, 14 November 2000.

[40] *Prâyôgika Sinhala Shabdhakôshaya*, Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1982, Vol. I, p. 337.

urumaya may have less significance for those without any property whatsoever, and may have special appeal to the propertied classes. By 'propertied classes' I encompass not only the rich, but also smallholders and householders, in other words the petty bourgeoisie, a considerable force in Sri Lanka during the last 150 years. However, the term is a vehicle for all types of rights: when the Sinhala Buddhist villagers of Munnesvarampattuva contested the Hindu priest's attempt to get rid of their association with this powerful temple, they spoke of their *urumaya*.[41]

The seductive appeal of *urumaya* is compounded by its coupling with *Sĩhala*. As a label of self-description *Sĩhala* and its synonyms carry the affectivity that most such collective nouns possess. Thus, *Sĩhala urumaya* or its alternative, *Hela urumaya*, have been, and remain, phrases loaded with sentimental value. *Hela urumaya* was a phrase that was deployed by Munidasa Cumaratunga (1887–1944) and his followers. During the latter part of his career Cumaratunga initiated a movement of linguistic revival devoted to the purification of the Sinhala language. This involved an assault on Sanskritic and other accretions associated with the 'Mixed Sinhala' of the classical period (6th to 15th centuries) and a return to the older Elu or Hela forms of original antiquity.[42]

To fortify the language in this manner, in his view, was to fortify the nation, the *hela rãsa*, or Sinhala people. In 1941, he established the Hela Havula, or 'Pure Sinhalese Fraternity', as an instrument of this programme (Dharmadasa 1972: 136). The Hela Havula campaigned in English as well as in Sinhala. Cumaratunga launched the journal *The Helio* in 1941 as a companion series to his *Subasa* (1939 *et seq.*) and used the term 'Helese' rather than Sinhalese. In openly contesting the leading Sinhala scholars of that day, this movement initiated an internal struggle that argued for the superiority of the term 'Hela', over the label 'Sinhalese' or 'Sinhala'—and thus *Hela urumaya* over *Sĩhala urumaya*. This battle was part of their effort to reach for an original linguistic purity uncontaminated by Indian words. This emphasis has a racist hue because it was accompanied by an attempt on the part of some advocates to deny Indian racial origins. This meant the undercutting of the Vijaya symbol by reaching back into the fabled history of the era before Vijaya,

[41] E-mail memo from Rohan Bastin, who observed that the Tamil equivalent, '*urumai*', is also loaded with symbolism.

[42] See Dharmadasa (1972) and (1992a. 261–90). The Elu syllabary has thirty-two letters composed of twelve vowels and twenty consonants, whereas the Sinhala syllabary has fifty-four letters made up of eighteen vowels and thirty-six consonants (Kulasuriya 1990: 187).

involving a resurrection of the figure of Râvana from the *Râmâyana*. Thus, the poet Raipiel Tennakoon denigrated Râma and exalted Râvana.[43] Since such infinite regression could, as Wakkumbura observes, 'end up in the caves of the early Sri Lankan aboriginals', this spin involved an effort to forge a Greek link, thereby retaining the alleged 'Aryan' ancestry.[44]

The point about this virulent internal debate among Sinhala language activists is that it has functioned, much like the internal conflicts among Eelamist Tamil nationalists, to promote deep attachments. The symbolic value inscribed within the idea *urumaya* is compounded as an indirect outcome of this sort of struggle. Among those who used this phrase in an evocative manner was Puranandu Jinadas Gunasekera, who published a book in 1973 called *Language of the very ancient Hela commentaries*. Significantly, he is credited with a panegyric poem to Cumaratunga as well as a racist booklet entitled *Kochchin pănnû vîrayâta sihivatanayak*, or 'Remembering the hero who drove out the Cochin people'.[45] Gunadas's career reflects a stream of consciousness within the Hela Havula that was associated with the Left Movement of the 1930s to the 1950s, but which eventually moved into the chauvinist camp because of its staunch indigenist orientations.[46]

In overview, then, *urumaya* is an evocative word in the everyday world of the Sinhalese, being implicated in the transmission of property as well as of societal values. Thus, the concept enters prosaic books on 'Our cultural heritage' (*Apê sanskrutika urumaya*, by K.D.P. Wickramasinghe, Colombo, Indika Printers, 1976). It was also inscribed within the title of Walpola Râhula Thera's major work, *Bhiksuvagê Urumaya* (The heritage of the bhikkhu). Printed in 1946, this treatise articulated the views of a radical socialist faction of *bhikkhus* at Vidyalankara University. It was a clarion call for the intervention of monks in political affairs and social welfare. It is a work that is permeated by a reading of Lanka's history, invariably a selective interpretation with 'its "facts" [being] primarily derived from the *Mahavamsa*' (Seneviratne 1999: 168).

[43] E-mail memo from Wakkumbura, 20 December 2000, with one reference being *Vavuluva, the Saga of the Bat*.

[44] E-mail memo, 21 December 2000.

[45] E-mail memo from Wakkumbura, 20 December 2000.

[46] This was also true of several old-school Marxists who were not part of the Hela Havula. The outstanding illustration is Philip Gunawardena and the Mahâjana Eksat Peramuna which he founded as a breakaway group from the LSSP.

This book was presented in English translation in 1974. This version includes a postscript that celebrates the achievements initiated and secured by the Bandaranaike administrations after 1956. Significantly, however, in this edition, Râhula 'advocat[es] a narrowly Sinhala Buddhist culture' that is at odds with the cosmopolitan modernism of the original work (Seneviratne 1999: 183–88). Thus, by the early 1970s, Râhula had shifted ground. He was en route to a position that eventually saw him participating in the vociferous campaign mounted in 1995-and-thereabouts by a number of *bhikkhu* and lay organisations against the proposals initiated by another Bandaranaike (Chandrika Kumaratunga) for a devolution of power aimed at appeasing the minorities.[47]

What such evidence and the emphasis on *urumaya* indicate is a form of primordialist thinking, a belief in the Sinhala people's firm roots in the soil of the land continuing back in linear fashion to the point of origin. The political claims, as well as the sense of belonging and being, associated with such a belief in a great civilisational past are thereby seen as incontrovertible. The thinking is rendered as deep as it is dogmatic. That is why Wickramasinghe could use Vijaya as his justification for contemporary rights without any elaboration being provided.

My contention is that *urumaya* was a considered and intelligent choice of title by the elite leaders of the Sîhala Urumaya. The strategic aspect of this act should not preclude attention to sentiments that may have impelled such a choice. It is my argument that *urumaya* is an image that has profound resonances that tap into the stock of historical 'knowledge' that has been inscribed within the thinking of many Sinhalese by a century-and-half of empiricist and positivist history framed around the political history associated with the *Mahâvamsa*. These facts and interpretations have been coined by the discipline of history that was fashioned by the British educational system and continued after independence in 1948, though it was a history that could lean on the Pali chronicles of yesteryear. Needless to say, the diffusion of these lines of thought into popular culture was assisted by the growth of literacy, the expansion of educational facilities and the development of print technology during the late 19th and the 20th centuries. But our familiarity with Anderson's thesis should not blind us to the power of oral and visual modes of cultural transmission among Asian peoples. The outlines of the *Mahâvamsa* thesis, as the first part of my article indicated, seem to

[47] See the picture of Râhula addressing a meeting that was chaired by Mahânâyake Palipâné Chandânanda in 1996 and devoted to condemning the devolution package (Seneviratne 1999: centrefold).

have been part of popular culture before print media entered the scene. It follows that oral story-telling and visual representations in sculpture, temple wall paintings and *tovil* artefacts continued to weave their influence in parallel with print media during the modern era.[48]

As a result, such ideas as '2,500 years of history'[49] and 'sons of the soil' are powerful signs. The worth that is attached to such icons marks convictions that have been fused together by a devotion to Buddhism as well as the secular cosmology of positivist historical 'fact'. These signs within the talk of Sîhala Urumaya personnel point to the significance of Vijaya in their cosmology, hovering unspoken at depth as the font of firstness, primacy, greatness and political right. Wickramasinghe's article happens to be an explicit illustration of this strand of reasoning, one that links Vijaya with the need for a unitary state. It is not necessary for Wickramasinghe to be a member of Sîhala Urumaya for me to present this assertion. I have indicated the overlaps that suggest that the manifesto of the Sîhala Urumaya embodies opinions held by individuals outside its confines.

In addition, I stress here that which is well known. The opposition to the devolution of power to the Tamils has been vigorous from the moment that the PA government deemed the electoral victories of 1994–95 to be a mandate to proceed with a scheme of devolution. Numerous associations sprang forth to join older bodies that were vehemently opposed to the idea of devolution and a peace package. These forces in Sri Lanka were joined by 'voices' on the cybernet waves.[50] Among the strident new associations that emerged in order to campaign against the PA's project have been the SVV (1995), the Eksath Sinhala Mahâ Sabhâva[51] and the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT), formed in 1998 under the leadership of Champika Ranawake, an engineer by training and a firebrand orator by reputation.

[48] For elaboration, see Roberts (2000d). Also see Bandaranayake (1986), W.A. de Silva (1915–16), Holt (1991), and Kapferer (1983).

[49] A remarkable instance of this 'sign' being adopted by the allies outside the Sinhala fold was provided by Rauf Hakeem, the leader of the Muslim party within the PA coalition, as he greased the palm, so to speak, of those whom he was appealing to. He referred in a speech in late October 2000 to the '2,500-year-old unity that prevails between the various communities that inhabit this beautiful island home'.

[50] See www.lanka.web.com; www.spur.asn.au; and www.sinhale.org among a range of possibilities, several with cross-listings.

[51] Centred around the Secretary, Dr. Nath Amarakone, and having two lawyers, Prins Gunasekera and J. Kulatilleke, and Dudley Gunasekera (formerly a president of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress) as a three-person Presidium. See www.voiceoflanka.net.

In April 2000 the debacle at Elephant Pass galvanised 'four Sinhala organisations under the leadership of the Maha Sangha' (including the SVV and the NMAT) into assembling at the Young Men's Buddhist Association at Borella on 11 April 2000. Here, they declared 'seven non-negotiable principles which should be taken into account in the process of constitution making', the first of which was the retention of a unitary state structure of Sri Lanka (*Island*, 12 April 2000).

It was within this immediate context that the Sîhala Urumaya was set up on 20 April 2000.[52] In my view, its members include (or included) many concerned patriots with a deep concern for the situation of their country in general and the Sinhalese in particular. This assertion is made on the basis of my personal acquaintance with some individuals or the evidence of their public engagements in previous years. I refer here to such individuals as Mithra Wettimuni, Malinga Gunaratne, Madduma Bandara, S.W. Walpita, Chula de Silva and A.V. de S. Indraratne. An important catalyst for this new party and its decision to contest the elections on an island-wide basis, surely an ambitious project, appears to have been the merger of the energies of S.L. Gunasekera with those of Tilak Karunaratne. Gunasekera brought his constitutional acumen as well as a high status to the position of party leader and masthead. Karunaratne brought great wealth as a businessman as well as experience as a politician. By the time of the election in October several associations that had been agitating against devolution and many professional personnel from a wide range of occupations had coalesced under the umbrella of the Sîhala Urumaya to make up its disparate front. They contested constituencies across the board, even in the Jaffna Peninsula. They were quite explicit in anticipating a hung parliament that would enable them to carry weight as a significant third party.

The wishful expectations of the Sîhala Urumaya were blown apart at the general elections of 10 October 2000. They secured a total of 127,863 votes, some 1.47 per cent of the total votes. This was enough to secure them one National List Member of Parliament, but the fact remained that they had not won any constituency. This has encouraged some observers to deride the new party. The denigration turned to glee in some quarters when the Sîhala Urumaya leadership was split asunder as they squabbled over which individual should represent them in parliament. The split has been described by no less a person than

[52] Date from the Internet site. The foundation assembly was on 27 April 2000.

Karunaratne[53] as 'a class struggle' between members of the SU proficient in English and those who converse in the Sinhala medium.

Any conclusion that the new party has a limited future in the political firmament would be premature. Such opinions underestimate the forces and *the thinking* behind the Sīhala Urumaya. The second segment of my article, indeed, has been directed towards developing this point of view as part of a strategy that links it with the thinking of V.K. Wickramasinghe, who has so much in common with the professionals who drew up the manifesto of Sīhala Urumaya.

Let me provide the reasons for this evaluation. In the first place, the Sīhala Urumaya had very little lead-up time to get its campaign and electoral machinery going. In this regard, its position in 2000 was not unlike that of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party under S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike when the latter fronted up for the general elections of 1952 (after being founded in 1951). Second, I speculate on *a priori* grounds that individual voters in Sri Lanka make their choices for a multiplicity of reasons. These include familial traditions and contemporary networks indicating the possibility of specific material rewards if one supports a particular party or local candidate. It would seem that a substantial number are oriented towards putting a specific party into power. The Sīhala Urumaya was never in the running in this regard and carried this debilitating burden into the elections.

There is another reason for their poor showing, however. I lean on the election analysis provided by the New Left Front. This was a coalition of Marxist radicals attached to the vision of a socialist and multi-ethnic island. As such it included many Trotskyists and Communists from the Old Left of the 1930s to 1960s, as well as a handful drawn from younger generations. These are the 'true believers' whose adherence to Marxist principles stands out the more sharply when placed beside those leftists of yesteryear who have taken a strident pro-Sinhala position in recent times.[54] Though in the political wilderness for many decades, the constituent units of the New Left Front also contested the elections. They fared poorly and secured only around 32,000 votes. But this background nevertheless establishes their credentials. They are familiar with the

[53] See Tilak Karunaratne's comments reported in the *Daily News*, 18 October 2000, on the Internet. But also see S.L. Gunasekera's statement on the same day and the various reports and letters to the editor in the newspapers in the weeks that followed. A number of 'professionals' resigned together with Gunasekera.

[54] Illustrations are provided by Nalin de Silva and Gunadasa Amarasekera (Jātika Chinthanaya or 'National Thought') and by Buddhadasa Hewavitarna (SU).

nitty-gritty of grassroots campaigning even though they have been notoriously unsuccessful in recent years in mobilising votes. And this is what they had to say:[55]

> The Sinhala racist opposition of Sihala Urumaya, though [they] could not get elevated in any district, managed to push all [the] major parties towards the racist slogans. Not only PA and UNP, but the JVP too was totally carried away by SU hysteria. In fact JVP became a remorseless victim of SU appeal and their slogans. They contained the SU growth by taking SU slogans into their hand. ... While ... PA used the slogan 'First the war against the LTTE, then the political solution for the Tamils' for the same purpose. In fact PA started new operations to confirm to the people of the South about (*sic*) the genuineness of their slogan!

In brief, then, the main parties, as well as the Janatâ Vimukti Peramuna, stole the Sîhala Urumaya's clothes. Those voters who were, at any point of time, attached to the preservation of a unitary state and wanted the Tigers to be annihilated[56] could vote for the other stronger parties without having to veer to the Sîhala Urumaya. In other words, I conjecture that within both the SLFP and the UNP one finds elements that are strongly attached to the idea of a unitary state.

Such persons are susceptible to appeals couched in the vocabulary of '2,500 years of history' and 'Vijaya'. Such symbols are part of a deep belief system. Where those symbols are challenged,[57] there, at such sites/moments, one is likely to provoke a sharp reaction. Witness V.K. Wickramasinghe's lengthy and vigorous response.

In more momentous terms, the military success of the Tigers in the Vanni and the Elephant Pass battles did just that.[58] The agitated political outpourings and new coalitions that emerged in April 2000 and the months that followed are proof of such worries. Located as I am in the diasporic world of Sri Lankans, I witness these concerns every now and

[55] *Island*, 19 October 2000, on the Internet.

[56] How many? I refer here to a proportion of the populace whose percentages have never been computed with reasonable authority. I am aware that various sociological and opinion surveys exist, but remain sceptical about the measures of standardisation and the overall precision of the results. Again, when individuals say they wish the war to end, they do not necessarily wish for a federal state.

[57] My 'History as dynamite' was deliberately exaggerated to constitute such a challenge

[58] So do the claims of the Tamil and Muslim parties that have allied with the People's Alliance and are now, after the elections, in a position to bargain for spoils as the price of keeping the PA afloat within a hung parliament.

then among Sinhalese living abroad. Invariably, my contacts in Australia and elsewhere[59] have mostly been with middle-class Sinhalese of the age group 40–75. Most pursue, or have pursued, occupations that would be classified within the genteel professions, precisely the social background of leading personnel in the Sīhala Urumaya.

In the 1980s, the opposition to the Tamil claims was sometimes couched in seemingly rational terms. 'Is it feasible', I was asked on one occasion, 'to have two states in one small island?'[60] 'Is Eelam viable?' In these everyday exchanges, sometimes, it is that which is unsaid that is more central than that which is 'said'. Behind this question, as I intuitively comprehended it then, was a profound concern aroused by the prospect of a divided island. To this person, even the thought was a haunting spectre.

Since the LTTE has sustained a de facto state in the northern regions in the 1990s, and this fact has slowly entered the consciousness of the Sinhalese at home and abroad, such a ground of challenge—the supposed non-viability of Eelam—has not been easy to sustain. So what has emerged in the 1990s is an insistence that the Tigers be defeated and that a unitary state committed to uniform laws and the principle of equality be established in order to meet the needs of the minorities. One expression of this push was an open letter published by 'Twenty Six Professionals' on 18 June 1995 (*Sunday Island*). Adopting the high moral ground, and in reasonable voice, the letter objected to federalism as 'an irrevocable divesting of power by the Central Government.' It then proclaimed that 'the entirety of the territory of Sri Lanka is equally the homeland of all her citizens who are, and must always be, entitled to equal rights in every part of that territory. No part of Sri Lanka is, or can ever be considered to be, the "exclusive homeland" of any group of citizens belonging to any particular race.' Significantly, the signatories included S.L. Gunasekera and Gunadasa Amarasekera. Here, then, was an early herald of the Sīhala Urumaya.[61]

[59] From second-hand information from a friend who was present, I gathered that Nalin de Silva visited London on one occasion in 1995 and drew a large and appreciative audience at his talk. The 'Lankaweb' site on the Internet has a subsection on 'Views' which, as it stood in November 2000, contains all manner of letters from Sri Lankans of the diaspora commenting on the Sīhala Urumaya. One by 'Asoka' in Australia, an avid SU worker partial to the NMAT, is particularly interesting

[60] It is said that Rajiv Gandhi put this more arrogantly 'Into how many pieces can you cut a peanut?'—for which a price was paid!

[61] For an elaboration of this position, see Gunasekera's book (1996)

The constitutional lines of these presentations should not be allowed to veil the essentialised understandings of the island's history that provide the milieu, 'the conditions of possibility' if you wish, that imbricates the argument. The *Mahâvamsa* ideology and the idea that the island of Lanka is a *Sîhaladîpa* and *Dhammadîpa* are notions that have been inscribed into the modern historiography of the island as well as popular thought.[62] Questioning this tradition sometimes evokes apoplectic responses of the same order as the apocalyptic fears aroused by striking Tiger successes. Behind the constitutional voice of S.L. Gunasekera and others of like mind is a depth of concern that can swell into more 'tidal' proportions, especially when spurred by menacing forces or by the populace to whom they appeal. The moderation of voice is compromised by its constituency, its historical conceptions and its imperatives. It is towards a clarification of one such imperative, the assumption that the Sinhalese established the original civilisational order within the island, that my article has been directed. This assumption can lie below the threshold of argument. And even when it appears, as in Wickramasinghe's case, it emerges as a maxim that requires no elaboration. Such unelaborated codes are an index of the power of such thought-forms.

For those of a different political persuasion—and I am one of them—to dismiss the concerns of the Sîhala Urumaya and those of like mind as fables and absurdities would be as arrogant as it is impolitic. Vijaya and Dutugämunu cannot be dumped unto the scrap heap of history with the wave of a rationalist wand in the manner of a David Scott (1999: chaps. 2 and 4). Godfrey Gunatilleke has shown the path to retaining their worth within a thrust towards 'a reasoned liberation from the past'. This path does mount a challenge to the Sinhala chauvinists inside and outside the Sîhala Urumaya, but it opens the door to dialogue because it does not require a wholesale jettisoning of the Vijaya story. It can therefore be a step towards workable, contemporary, political compromises.

[62] On these concepts, see Malalgoda (1970) and Roberts (1994: 256, 264). Also see fn. 2 and paragraph 2 in the text. The term *Tunsinhala* and its numerous variants (e.g., *Tunrajaya*, *Trisinhalaya*) all convey the same idea. *Tunsinhala* is conventionally translated as the 'Three Sinhalas' in the sense of the three provinces into which the island was divided in the medieval period. However, Seneviratne's neat rendering of the idea as 'Threefold Sinhala' provides a perceptive inflection. This was part of his caption for a picture of a political ritual involving the lighting of three lamps united in a single flame by Gammaddegama Gnânissara Thera in 1996 during the protests against devolution. The unity of three in one flame stands for 'Threefold Sinhala'. To consider the *Tunsinhala* idea as evocative of federalism, however, is to inject modern political ideas into a milieu that cannot contain them.

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OBITUARY

Pravin Visaria

The editors and Editorial Board of *Contributions to Indian sociology* express their deep sorrow at the death of Professor Pravin Visaria, Director of the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, who passed away in Mumbai on 28 February 2001.

Professor Visaria received his Ph.D. in Economics from Princeton University in 1963. He was Reader and then Professor in the Department of Economics, University of Bombay (1963–73), Economist at the Development Research Center, World Bank (1973–80), Professor of Demography at the Sardar Patel Institute of Economic and Social Research, Ahmedabad (1980–83), and Director of the Gujarat Institute of Development Research (1983–96). He became Director of the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, in 1996. From 1991 he served as Honorary Chairman of the Governing Council of the National Sample Survey Organisation, Government of India. He also worked closely with the Planning Commission, Department of Statistics, Office of the Registrar General, and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of India.

Pravin Visaria's numerous publications include *The sex ratio of the population of India* (1971); *Infant mortality in India* (co-edited, 1988); *Non-agricultural employment in India: Trends and prospects* (co-edited, 1993); *Contraceptive use and fertility in India: A case study of Gujarat* (1995); and *Urbanization in large developing countries* (co-edited, 1997).

His advice and support to the editors of *Contributions to Indian sociology* were greatly valued, and will be sorely missed.

Of related interest

THE UNORGANISED SECTOR

Work security and social protection

Edited by **Renana Jhabvala** *and*
R.K.A. Subrahmanya

The unorganised sector today comprises 92.5 per cent of India's workforce and contributes approximately 63 per cent of the country's GNP. Despite the size and importance of this sector, there are few official schemes which provide social security to this workforce. Further, the state has begun to withdraw from its traditional role, as the old models of social security are now considered to be no longer economically viable for this sector. As a result, workers in the unorganised sector are obliged to fend for themselves in times of sickness, old age and disaster even as they subsist on low wages with no job security.

This important book presents various options for providing social security to the unorganised sector. Adopting a practical rather than theoretical approach to the issue, the contributors examine various government-sponsored social security schemes and also describe the experiences of some non-governmental organisations in the areas of health care, child care and different forms of insurance. The volume will be of particular interest to professionals and scholars in the fields of social work, labour studies, development studies, sociology, economics, policy studies and human resource development.

The contributors: Mihir Bhatt ▪ Mirai Chatterjee ▪ Martha Alter Chen ▪ U.N. Jajoo ▪ Renana Jhabvala ▪ Brinda Singh ▪ SEWA Rural Team ▪ R.K.A. Subrahmanya ▪ Mina Swaminathan ▪ Jayshree Vyas

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Also from Sage

INTERROGATING CULTURE

Critical Perspectives On Contemporary Social Theory

Sarah Joseph

Sarah Joseph has successfully tried to convey the message that cultural explanation should not be mistaken as an alternative to the economic and political explanation. Culture is being analysed not just with an academic and theoretical orientation, it has been juxtaposed with politics and philosophy. The author's attempt to examine the principal debates on cultural available today in social science is a welcome addition to the growing literature on culture studies.

The Deccan Herald

Joseph's effort to insist on the revelation of the hidden dimensions of power and ideology in the discourse on culture is both commendable and necessary.

Indian Review of Books

Drawing on the experiences and concerns of Third World societies like India, the book discusses some important debates in contemporary political theory such as the liberal/communitarian debate, colonial discourse analysis and the debate between communitarians and secularists in India. The book critically examines the concepts of culture which these discourses embody and addresses issues of power and knowledge in relation to culture.

An important contribution to on-going debates in both the west and in developing countries, it will interest those in the fields of social and political theory, cultural studies, postmodernism, sociology and political science.

Contents: *Acknowledgements*/Introduction/Culture and Community/The Curse of Modernity?/Culture/Knowledge: The Indigenous Social Science Debate/Liberals, Communitarians and the Protection of Cultural Diversity/ Indian Communitarians and the Politics of Difference/Conclusion/*Subject Index/Author Index/About the Author*

220mm × 140mm/hb/200pp./1998

Sage Publications
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NARENDRA SUBRAMANIAN, *Ethnicity and populist mobilization: Political parties, citizens and democracy in south India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. xxii + 371 pp. Tables, map, notes, bibliography, indexes. Rs. 575 (hardback).

Studies of political mobilisation in India have, for the most part, tended to be rather dull narratives, offering more by way of description than explanation. In Narendra Subramanian's book on Tamil Nadu, we have a refreshing approach to the study of political mobilisation, one which has been enriched by opening its windows wide and letting the winds of historical anthropology and interpretive social theory blow about freely. Subramanian's study lays claim to many kinds of distinctiveness. First, it offers an alternative to the standard account of ethnic conflict as transacted between the state and ethnic elites, in the form of an account of how ethnic parties transact with social groups. Second, it seeks to explain the relative absence of violent ethnic conflict in Tamil Nadu in terms of the populist politics of the Dravidian parties and their social pluralism, which interpreted community inclusively and flexibly, assimilated the intermediate and lower strata, and promoted autonomous associational activity in Tamil society. The politics of the Dravidian parties thus effectively contained the potential for conflict in ethnic mobilisation, and actually helped to reinforce stability in a pluralist democracy. Finally, in another important departure, the author gives primacy to populism over charisma, and provides a rich account of populist politics. He distinguishes between assertive populism (which encourages excluded groups to militant action) and paternalist populism (which gives the leader/party the initiative in providing for them).

These arguments are persuasively developed through a historical survey of Dravidian party politics, beginning with the anti-Brahminical 'politics of heresy' and rituals of inversion practised by the DK under Periar's leadership. The Annadurai strategy of appealing to a wider social base through a looser interpretation of Dravidian identity, in terms of language rather than ties of blood, inaugurated the more inclusive politics of the DMK. Subramanian provides a detailed account of the assertive populism of the DMK, for its agitational politics of language in the 1960s to its inconsistent attempts at practising paternalist populism in the 1970s. The unique appeal of the ADMK—created after M.G. Ramachandran's split from the DMK—was its paternalist populism. Its emphasis on addressing basic needs, through providing subsidised food and banning liquor, won for it the support of formerly excluded groups like the poor

and women. By distributing goods like rice and small loans, it could also reach out to a larger number of people than the DMK, which distributed patronage through land and jobs. This form of pro-poor populism was not always coherent with social pluralism, but the ADMK managed to reconcile these, through caste quotas, agrarian subsidies and its handling of trade unions.

The author argues that, unlike in other parts of India, ethnicity in Tamil Nadu was not disruptive and violent, and explains this deviance in terms of the organisational and social pluralism of the Dravidian parties. The two types of populism had distinct consequences for social pluralism: if the assertive populism of the DMK gave greater cadre autonomy to its supporters, the paternalist populism of the ADMK made them more dependent on the party leader's patronage. However, in both cases, social pluralism and the increased representation of newly emerging groups encouraged stability, contained any potential for violent ethnic conflict, and also kept the forces of Hindu revivalism at bay.

Tamil exceptionalism leads the author to argue that social forces such as these, which promote a tolerant conception of cultural identity, are better at combating violent religious revivalism than 'those that assert culturally vacuous notions of Indian citizenship' (p. 326). The onus of making ethnic forces more tolerant is placed on citizens committed to pluralist democracy, who should mobilise autonomously of states and parties, though still engaging with these. While the objective could not be worthier, there is a certain dissonance between the bulk of the book and its last few pages. The political universe of the book is Tamil Nadu, and its main actors are political parties. It is not easy to see how this otherwise compelling argument can be transposed onto the much larger, and more complex, political universe of the Indian nation. Moreover, transferring the initiative from the political parties to citizens is not something logically implied by the case study. Hence, while Subramanian's argument about tolerance being a more effective guarantor of ethnic peace than a pan-Indian notion of citizenship is unexceptionable, the route to an ethic of tolerance is less clear. Notwithstanding this, Subramanian's is a sophisticated and insightful book, which enriches the literature on political mobilisation in India.

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F.G. BAILEY, *The civility of indifference: On domesticating ethnicity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996. xvi + 184 pp. Plates, notes, references, index. Rs. 445 (hardback).

The immediate inspiration for this book is the ethnic strife, violence and genocide that accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia. How is it that 'ethnic groups that had seemed reconciled to living together ... were then torn apart with murderous conflicts'? Bailey's approach to the study of communal and ethnic/racial conflict is fairly innovative and novel, in that he begins with a counterfactual. Why is it that in the village of Bisipara in Orissa, ethnic strife or caste discord

that erupted over forty years ago (between the dominant caste '*warriors*' and the *dalit* '*panos*') did not transform into a genocidal inter-group conflict, as it has in other situations? Bailey suggests that this was because interaction across social divides was facilitated through a 'civility of indifference'; societies such as Bisipara, functioning with premodern polities, were based on a critical balance of separation and inequality. In contrast to fanaticisms involving 'moral fervour', people in Bisipara, the author argues, exhibited 'pragmatic indifference'. Perceiving that mindless fanaticism would lead to self-destruction, and being accustomed to and always disposed towards calculating utility and the consequences of proposed actions, the people of Bisipara chose moderation, eschewed excess, and displayed remarkable restraint faced with stresses and strains on community cohesion.

The book is written in the form of a memoir based on the author's fieldwork during 1952–55, and for a brief period in 1959. While his basic thesis regarding the outbreak and containment of ethnic conflict seems quite plausible, there are several problems both with the way in which Bailey marshals his arguments and with his attempts at generalising the Bisipara case, as well as with the 'remembered village' approach. To take the last issue first, forty years is a fairly long time, and the changes since then may disprove the author's contentions, especially because the events recounted here pertain to a period when changes resulting from larger politico-economic shifts at the national level were yet to be felt at the local level, but which subsequently impacted heavily on social mobility, horizontal mobilisation of castes, and the politicisation of social groups at various levels of society. Bailey is aware of these changes and attempts to factor them into his narrative; however, in the absence of analysis of what happened in the subsequent years and decades, the narrative appears to be disjointed and meandering at times. There is too much conjecture regarding what might have been the explanations for events, and there are too many inferences from observations not followed up later.

The author takes great pains to show the moderation practised by the Bisipara villagers, the 'care [they took] not to threaten their way of life', the effects of 'resolute pragmatism' on inhibiting what he calls 'moral fervour', and the implications of these for preventing minor skirmishes from turning into bloody strife. However, this argument does not seem very convincing especially given the large-scale outbursts of inter-caste violence across the country in subsequent decades, especially violence against the low-caste *dalits*. A simple explanation that Bailey offers is that politicians at the local and state levels in Orissa at that time 'had nothing to gain by exploiting ethnic hostilities'. Such an argument is simplistic, and ignores the influence of dominant castes on political leaders; it is fairly well documented now that competing struggles for social mobility lead to horizontal mobilisation of castes which finds its echoes in the political arena as well. If 'ethnicity ... was taken for granted and remained below the threshold of ideological debate' and did not escalate into endemic and large-scale violence, surely the inability of the lower-caste *panos* to mobilise themselves at a larger

level of aggregation, and hence their failure to pose a serious threat to the dominance of the upper castes, was a reason for this?

Finally, in attempting to draw lessons from the Bisipara case to understand Yugoslav-type events, the author ought to have given some thought to the conceptual distinctions between caste and ethnicity. The two concepts have more than semantic differences, and, even though in the classical sociological tradition both refer to 'status' groups, there are differences in the way in which caste and ethnic groups are organised and inter-group relations are structured. This is not to deny that caste groups can be analysed as ethnic groups. However, at the level of a village community, categorising *jatis* as ethnic groups may confound the issues of how groups actually cohere, cooperate, and relate to each other. Since Frederick Barth's seminal work on ethnic boundaries, we know the importance and role of contact and interaction between groups in maintaining group boundaries and identities. However, at the village level, it becomes difficult to demonise and scapegoat a particular caste when the dominant caste is dependent on and interacts with the lower caste on an everyday basis, and has a great deal of familiarity with the 'other'. A certain distancing is necessary for ethnic groups to develop prejudiced and biased images of the 'other', which cannot take place between *jatis* at a village level unless there are other factors intervening.

An enterprising young scholar can perhaps revisit Bisipara forty years after Bailey's last visit and find out how Bisipara has changed over time, and whether the 'civility of indifference' still holds.

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SUBRATA K. MITRA and DIETMAR ROTHERMUND, eds., *Legitimacy and conflict in South Asia*. Delhi: Manohar, 1997. viii + 279 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. Rs. 550 (hardback).

The edited volume under review is the fruitful outcome of an international seminar on the nature of conflicts and notions of legitimacy in South Asia. Most of the essays delineate the challenges posed to governance by varying conflict-related situations, and the capabilities of diverse political systems to meet such challenges through co-option, coercion and the creation of new institutional arrangements. The volume, on the whole, has covered varying phases as well as places in South Asia while illuminating a vibrant interaction between conflict and legitimacy. Let me convey a few interesting insights and arguments that emerge from these articles.

Rothermund's attempt to view conflict as a challenge to legitimacy in a historical perspective unveils the dialectical interaction between British colonial rule in India and the challenge posed to its legitimacy by Gandhi. Gandhi's challenge was taken up seriously by the colonial rulers and, in the process of countering it, they also noted that there was no overlapping consensus among different communities as well as elite groups to combat British power. Thus, the British

found Muslims, princes, untouchables and the peasants useful in playing the game of divide and rule. Gandhi, in response to these tactics, attempted to counter the British by winning over the estranged segments of the population. Thus, he supported the Khilafat movement in 1919, embraced the causes that were dear to peasants and untouchables and tried to incorporate a wider section of people within the fold of the freedom struggle. Mitra's discussion of the relationship between rules, institutions, governance and legitimacy is theoretically sensitive and provides a quick overview of the existing scholarly writings in this area. One of his important insights is locating nationalities within an institutional framework. Accordingly, Telugu and Tamil nationalism have found a home within the Indian Republic, but the same cannot be said about Sikh nationalism that is still testing the limits of India's secular state. Partha Ghosh in his serene and firm analysis of the rise of Hindutva forces provides a balanced appraisal of the anatomy of Hindu communalism in India. There is a tendency among the Hindu communalist forces to accuse the Muslim minorities of entertaining extra-territorial or trans-territorial loyalties. In this context, Ghosh's contention that in the medieval period Sufi traditions became integral to India's indigenous ethos deserves further probing. Gurharpal Singh, while discussing order and legitimacy in Punjab, brings into sharp focus the general plight of the peripheral states in South Asia that are locked in the struggle between the forces of order and disorder. Dasgupta's chapter on the changing nuances of democracy and development locates the problematique of federalism in the post-Nehru phase of Indian democracy. Indeed, as he suggests, the federal architecture of India's polity will be compelled to respond to complex challenges stemming from the demands for decentralisation and the rise of regions and regional identities.

Sathyamurthy, in his reflections on 'local politics, violence and Panchayat Raj', unravels the major trends in Indian polity such as corruption, criminalisation of politics and caste oppression and their mirroring at the local level. Conrad's discussion on conflicting legitimacies in Pakistan is sensitive to Jinnah's changing stances on religion. Jinnah underlined the significance of citizenship rather than religion in independent Pakistan in one of his speeches immediately after partition.

Murshid's article on Bangladesh is quite imaginative. He argues that Bangladesh has inherited a tradition of state intervention in the process of identity construction from Pakistan, where the state subscribed to Islamic ideology, albeit superficially. Shastri's analysis of the Sri Lankan political system underlines the inability of all the mainstream political parties in Sri Lanka to incorporate the aspirations of the Tamil minorities in their agenda. This, in turn, gradually eroded the legitimacy of the political system in Sri Lanka. Baral and Rose try to establish a connection between lack of vision and direction on the part of political parties and leaders, and crises of legitimacy in Nepal.

Keeping these major contributions in the background, it would be appropriate to note a few limitation of this volume. To start with, Subedi's article dealing with bilateral inter-state ties between India and Nepal is unconvincing. It neither

deals with the concept of legitimacy nor with the notion of conflicts; instead, it merely offers a chronological account of bilateral ties. Mitra's efforts to build a formal model of governance contribute little towards the understanding of the central theme of legitimacy and conflict. Sathyamurthy's essay is more driven by schematic formulations on inter-caste relations than any hard empirical data. Further, there seems to be a common tendency among the authors to pose legitimacy and conflict as binary opposites. Indeed, in most cases the erosion of legitimacy is a slow process and not an event triggered by direct conflict. It could as well be argued that even legitimate order is built by relatively stronger states through implicit modes of coercion rather than explicit consent. Finally, the role of external powers and forces in stimulating conflicts or influencing the processes of legitimisation could have found place in this volume, at least in one chapter.

University of Hyderabad RAJEN HARSHE

AKHIL GUPTA, *Postcolonial developments: Agriculture in the making of modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. xv + 409 pp. Tables, figures, plates, notes, index. Rs. 545 (hardback).

Agricultural change and state initiatives in rural development have been among the leading concerns of social scientists working on contemporary India. Led by the economists, social scientists have extensively documented the nature and extent of changes that have been taking place in rural India during the last five decades or so. Apart from examining the extent and nature of economic change, they have also debated the changing structures of social relationships and the institutional order of rural India.

In much of this literature, the basic premises of development are rarely questioned. Its universalistic assumptions about evolutionary change and its origin in colonial binaries has not been a source of much concern within the field of 'development studies'. Even those who have critiqued 'development' have tended to operate within the dichotomous framework that sees human societies as traditional and modern, and claims the superiority of the 'traditional structures' over the 'modern'.

Viewed against this background, Akhil Gupta's study is a bold and refreshing departure. Basing his argument on an ethnographic study of a village which he calls Alipur, located in a green revolution region of western Uttar Pradesh, Gupta looks at the experience of agrarian change from the perspective of 'postcoloniality'.

The term 'postcolonial', Gupta realises, is not an undisputed category. Its uses oscillate continuously between marking an era that comes after the demise of formal colonial rule and denoting an analytic approach that attempts to go beyond the binaries of colonial discourse. It is in the latter sense that he uses the term. As a methodological category 'postcoloniality' can help us understand 'the heterogeneous temporalities and cultural hybridities that go into constituting social life in postcolonial societies' (p. 22). At a more concrete level it would mean

paying 'close attention to the interconnections between divergent discourses and structural forces' (p. 6). As an example, Gupta points out that the 'local' understandings of agriculture in Alipur could not be understood simply as being 'traditional' or 'indigenous'. They were profoundly shaped by globally and nationally circulating discourses of development.

One of the core arguments of the book is that the apparatus and discourse of development is key to any definition of the 'postcolonial condition'. In the post–Second World War period, the apparatus of development institutionalised a new mode of governamentality that 'interpellated the newly independent nation-states of the Third World into particular temporal and spatial locations'. Temporally, they were positioned behind the West and spatially, no matter what their position on the map, all the newly emerging nation-states 'were located on "the periphery" of a world system whose center lay on the Euro-American axis' (p. 10).

Thus, Gupta argues, development is not only a matter of the economic position of a nation-state relative to others, but 'it is also crucially a form of identity in the postcolonial world. To be underdeveloped or developing is to be backward, deficient, inadequate, behind.... Development discourse, therefore, not only served to subject the Third World to Western control through a phalanx of institutions and treaties but has also created the "underdeveloped" as a subject and "underdevelopment" as a form of identity in the postcolonial world' (p. 11).

Though Gupta does provide an extensive account of what he observed and recorded during his field trips to Alipur, the book does not read like an empirical/ethnographic study. He has spent much more time in working out his theoretical arguments in different chapters of the book. Despite a rather ambitious agenda set out in the introductory chapter, Gupta primarily focuses upon two or three issues.

The first is an attempt at understanding and conceptualising the specificities of Indian modernity, concentrating particularly on the significance of the approach to agricultural development. Despite the obvious universalistic assumptions of the developmentalist discourse, the actual course or process of modernising could be multiple. Following Appadurai, Gupta contends that modernity itself could take diverse forms. The particularities of the Indian case lay in the character of the relationship between modernity and development. Development was not merely a strategy of social change but also a crucial source of legitimising the new regime.

Gupta argues that the most important feature of the Indian discourse of development has been what he calls the politics, policies and programmes of agrarian populism. Populism has not only been the medium in which the discourses and practices of development have been conveyed to the villagers, but has also provided one of the critical axes along which oppositional groups have organised support for their politics. Apart from locating the historical origins of populist development policies, Gupta also substantiates his argument through an ethnographic account of what his respondents told him in Alipur.

The other issues Gupta deals with extensively in his book relate to the recent debates on the questions of the 'indigenous knowledges' of agronomy and

ecology and global environmentalism. Arguing with those who tend to celebrate the 'indigenous', Gupta contends that the notion of 'indigenous' was twin to 'tradition' whose origins lay in the binaries created by colonialism. The farmers of his village 'did not conform to the descriptions of "traditional" farming or to the idealized picture of subalterns earnestly guarding "indigenous knowledges" against the insurmountable odds of a homogenizing world system' (p. 186). However, they also differed from the industrialist agriculturists of the West. Thus, the agrarian practices of the people of rural India, Gupta argues, ought to be looked at through concepts such as hybridity.

The book is surely an important contribution not only to the field of Indian agrarian studies but also to the social scientific literature on contemporary India.

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RAJA C. CHELLIAH and R. SUDARSHAN, eds., *Income-poverty and beyond: Human development in India*. New Delhi: Social Science Press, 1999. xxvi + 221 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, indexes. Rs. 395 (hardback).

The UNDP launched a Regional Poverty Alleviation Programme initiative in 1995. This book reports on background papers on India commissioned by the UNDP for its India Country Report under this initiative. The volume carries eight essays which are preceded by an introduction and followed by an epilogue. Chapters 1 to 4 and 6 sketch the extent and multiple dimensions of human deprivation in India. This is done by presenting levels and differences in household and per capita income, and by estimating the Head Count Ratio using Planning Commission Expert Group Methodology. Chapter 3 points to the large gap between income-poverty and capability-poverty (a multi-dimensional UNDP measure of human deprivation). This essay argues that programmes and policies aimed at reducing income-poverty do not necessarily guarantee a reduction in capability-poverty. Chapter 4 on Food Security suggests how improvements in food consumption are a necessary but not sufficient condition for overcoming the problem of malnutrition in India. More importantly, the chapter concludes that economic growth, per se, may not have a dramatic impact on nutritional status in the near future, and that effective and efficient food and environmental interventions are needed to free the poor from food and nutritional insecurity. Chapter 6 calculates the deprivation in health, knowledge and provisioning from both public as well as private sources by estimating a composite index, the Human Poverty Index.

Chapters 5, 7 and 8 are evaluative in nature. They examine the impact of anti-poverty strategies and programmes by reviewing public provisioning and analysing people's own perception and assessment of poverty. Chapter 5 lists various programmes for poverty eradication through employment generation, training and building up asset endowments of the poor and a targeted Public Distribution System (PDS) to protect the poor from inflationary pressures and provide them access to essential foods at affordable prices.

The authors (editors and presumably the original authors) see 'convincing evidence' (p. 129) of the beneficial impact of anti-poverty programmes. They do not see any need for evolving new anti-poverty programmes but only for 'sharp focusing' and 'suitable alteration' of the existing programmes to meet the requirements of the poor. That the authors reach such a conclusion is rather strange, especially when the text provides sufficient evidence on the limited 'achievements' of IRDP, TRYSEM and EAS (pp. 108–9). The authors see this only as an implementation failure. The real culprit is the 'delivery system'. Here again, in reviewing the delivery system, the authors make no critical analysis. The dynamics of the invisible hand of the market, heavy-handed state structures, and associations and agencies contending with the state and market in sustenance and eradication of poverty, are completely ignored in this analysis. All this betrays the 'Beyond' part in the title of the book.

Chapter 7 deals with the link between economic development and human development, the growth-mediated and security-led development strategies. The chapter makes an attempt to 'include education, health and nutritional deprivations in the definition of poverty, and to delineate the main features pertaining to financing of poverty alleviation programmes as well as social-sector services' (p. 141). The most significant finding is that a comparison of different allocation ratios in the pre- and post-adjustment periods indicates a decline across most states. This has happened even in states where the public expenditure ratio has increased during the adjustment period. The authors also point out that there is not only a decline in the relative share of social services in total revenue expenditure but also a deceleration in growth rates of social services expenditures in most states since the mid-1980s. The analysis in this chapter shows that economic growth as well as public provisioning constitute two equally important routes in influencing poverty levels.

Chapter 8 is the most interesting chapter in the book. It not only highlights the limitations of using income-poverty as an indicator or proxy for other forms of deprivation: 'many dimensions of poverty and deprivation are outside the purview of economic measurability but may be important indicators of a household's well being' (p. 173), but also questions the questionnaire method by which information on poverty (howsoever defined) is collected. It argues, and rightly so, in support of a 'reversal of frames', i.e., participatory methods of poverty assessment. Use of such methods reveals how the poor perceive poverty. The variables that the people use are quite different from the usual variables to identify human deprivation. Variables like the reliance of the poor on traditional patrons, landlords and resourceful people for sustenance, employment and income mobility and liquidity options; extent of personal freedom and dignity; access to common property resources; benefits of state intervention; jobs outside the village; absence of alcholism; contacts with the police; number of dependents; creditworthiness; and access to health and education facilities are some such examples. Interestingly, women often use additional or even different variables to identify the poor. Field surveys have found

women giving greater emphasis to social problems and problems relating to access to infrastructure.

This participatory method of identifying the poor not only makes a difference in terms of attributes but also alters the approach to overcoming poverty. It favours collective strategies and responses to overcome social indignity, poor conditions of employment, low wages and other forms of economic and social deprivation. This is a rights-based approach to poverty eradication which is gender sensitive. A rights-based approach focuses not only on the protection but also on the promotion of a more comprehensive set of rights (right to livelihood, right to education and right to a healthy environment) through positive public action.

What is intriguing is that the editors express their desire (in the epilogue) to go beyond the prevailing paradigm of income-poverty. However, the introduction argues that a disaggregated growth strategy will have to be the main vehicle for poverty reduction. The editors hope that the state has the potential to eradicate poverty with private-sector support, provided it state follows an export-led growth strategy, reduces taxes and fulfils conditions of macroeconomic stability. Sounds familiar!

The intriguing question is how this rights-based approach to poverty eradication fits in with the neo-liberal economic agenda. What happens to trade-aggravated poverty (*The Hindu*, 15 July 1999)? And what happens to the increasing casualisation of labour and feminisation of poverty in the export-oriented industries and other such evidence from the experience of South and Southeast Asian and other Third World economies? If the two fit with each other, the editors do not tell us how.

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ARTHUR KLEINMAN, VEENA DAS and MARGARET LOCK, eds., *Social suffering*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. xxvii + 404 pp. Plate, notes, index. Rs. 595 (hardback).

To write about *social* suffering—the qualification, I guess, is important, but cannot be commented upon in the course of a short review—presents an irresistible temptation, increased no doubt by the currency of that condition termed 'post-modernity', which licenses us to believe that suffering can now be understood more thoroughly because it is somewhat more visible and pervasive and from which it is possible to take a certain distance. Controversies about what constitutes social suffering notwithstanding—doubtless, the modes of experiencing pain and suffering can be either collective or individual, even as the forms of human suffering can be both local and global—the problematic of language has continued to dominate most talk about the distinctive features of suffering. The volume under review is no exception, although the various essays comprising it also converge on a body of substantive themes incorporating (*a*) cultural

representations of suffering as appropriated by and used within popular culture, historical memory and by particular social institutions for moral and political purposes; (*b*) suffering as a form of social experience confounding the category of the norm (or normality); and (*c*) political and professional process shaping the responses to various types of suffering. These traversals illustrate, as Kleinman, Das and Lock in their editorial introduction aver, 'great variations in the historical and cultural styles of suffering', so that even as the contributions each individually explore and contextually mediate the range of apprehensible regularities attaching to the phenomena of suffering, the volume as a whole is marked by a refusal to be satisfied with merely describing the specificities so discerned. Thus, for instance, the medical archetype underlying representations of suffering comes to be scrutinised in several of the essays —especially those by the Kleinmans, Anne Harrington, Margaret Lock and Vera Schwarcz, as also J.W. Bowker (albeit from an altogether different location, namely, religions and the problem of theodicy)—and the point is repeatedly made that people indeed suffer not only when 'illness' (or disease) afflicts them, but also as a consequence of processes of international political economy, state policies, bureaucratic practices and cultural forces. Arguments about the dangers of 'objectification', about discounting the moral reality of social suffering, are here combined with an examination of the processes that create and sustain the *medicalisation* of suffering.

More frontally, however, in advancing the thematic of suffering for social scientists to consider, the question needs to be posed how 'society' itself—social forces, generally—explain and handle catastrophe, misfortune or, again, social suffering. Three kinds of approaches stand out—although in terms of the treatment accorded, the contributions structuring *Social suffering* are each concerned to deliver upon the theme from within a specific combination of viewpoints. One might formulate *transcendentally*, working off the notion of a limit (or regulative idea) implicit within the claim to normality of a given state of affairs—the idea of suffering serving, accordingly, as the unstated object unifying sociological descriptions of the norm and providing them with the horizon of their intelligibility. Alternatively, one might approach the problem *immanently*, where suffering comes to be framed as the historically emergent product of deep-seated social processes on a global (or national) scale. And finally, in a philosophically fundamental manner, within the terms of some kind of *phenomenological ontology* of existence, where suffering comes to be expounded as part of the existential structure of human beings as revealed by a philosophically sensitive analysis of the constitution of experience. The first two approaches place the burden of justification for totalisation onto the phenomenon itself, namely, social suffering either as a form of knowledge or as a real process. The ground covered here—in the context of the volume under review, of course—is impressive: from Tu wei-Ming's appraisal of the socio-logic of Maoism as a source of social suffering to Allan Young's near-magisterial mapping of the moments in the genealogy of 'traumatic memory'; and across the spaces of Holocaust literature and

literature generally (Lawrence Ranger and David Morris respectively) to Paul Farmer's and Mamphela Ramphele's framing of the question about social suffering as having to do with the mechanisms by which social forces (ranging from poverty to racism) become embodied as individual experience. A fairly independent axis of investigation along this plane is the anthropologist Talal Asad's involved commentary on the structuring of Western discourses about cruelty.

To be sure, questions about modernity and modernisation serve as a generalised backdrop for these forays, with each testifying to the ways in which (to echo the editorial stipulation) 'our historically and culturally shaped commitments to particular versions of modernization construct moral quandaries, and how our usual practices of casting social experience as "natural" or "normal" obscure the greatly consequential workings of "power" in social life'. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of an epistemologically sensitive appraisal of suffering per se, it is the third approach viewed in the perspective of the second that holds the most promise. In this context, the essays by Veena Das and Valentine Daniel announce themselves, the former transposing for Wittgenstein's neat grammatological reading a larger phenomenology of body and pain offered as part of the attempt to write the meanings of violence against women in Indian society; and the latter a phenomenologically sensitive appraisal in context, bringing to light a kind of suffering that is diffuse and lasting and which asylum seekers and refugees (in this instance, Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka and mainly in the UK) endure. Both these contributions, each in its own way, confront the inadequacy of social science methods for the systematisation of the 'results' of investigations into suffering, and accordingly implore an alertness to the interrogation of reality in the lived experience of suffering *outside* social science.

Yet, for this reviewer, there is in all this medley of framings and approaches a much larger question of what needs to be (and what can be) restructured in the light of a reflective and non-mythical understanding of our ethical practices. Specifically, one needs to take the moment and the injunction to study social suffering as an opinion also about the normative foundations of scholarship; and, without doubt, this finds astute commentary in the reflections anchoring Stanley Cavell's reading of Das's essay. The challenge, of course, is how and where to begin; but, as the essays comprising *Social suffering* amply illustrate, the reflection ought to devolve upon the processes that abet and sustain suffering today.

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LAWRENCE COHEN, *No aging in India: Alzheimer's, the bad family, and other modern things*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. xxv + 367 pp. Plates, notes, references, glossary, index. $45.00 (hardback)/$35.00 (paperback).

'This book is about old age, and about its appearance and disappearance in the making of knowledge.' Thus Lawrence Cohen begins his book while laying 'the

ground of the argument'. This is a book on which he has worked for more than a decade, and his empathy for 'old' people mixed with an insightful analysis is a worthwhile presentation for readers who crave for a medical anthropology which decentres the medicalising mission from the discourse, and brings into play a wide range of issues that constitute the *aging* of a body.

Cohen pursues two broad questions, namely: 'How are those practices constituted by which bodily decay is experienced, named, measured, treated, and drawn into law and history and science?' And second: 'Why is it interesting to pose questions about senility in the first place?' (p. xvii). He goes on to elaborate on these questions in his short introduction and places them both in the context and texts of Alzheimer's 'in terms other than or in addition to those of a diagnosis or a disease: as a set of local and contingent practices rooted in culture and political economy' (p. 6). For investigation, exploration and analysis of his theme, Cohen engages himself with different sorts of materials gathered from open-ended interviews, participant observations, colonial records/books, contemporary scientific and social scientific texts, Web sites, literature, videos, films and photographs/graphics. From this, he creatively reconstructs his narrative on *No* aging in India.

In his first chapter 'Orientations', he locates the sites of his discursive world and elaborates on them, particularly highlighting the colonial theories of a 'soft native brain' and the genesis of Alzheimer's in the postcolonial era. He closely reads the diagnostic codes like DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) and ICD (International Classification of Diseases) hegemonised by the American Psychiatric Association and WHO respectively. His critical reading, while differentiating various dementias and discussing senility, gives us a comparative picture of the relation between the local and the universal. When senility is transformed into a disease model, Cohen comments critically that senility is attributional, which always requires a senile body, and a second one which recognises the change in the first. So 'growing sixtyish' in Varanasi and becoming a 'victim of Alzheimer's' in USA are fundamentally dialogic processes, which involve both an old person and some other (p. 33). His field experience in Nagwa, Varanasi, of testing the MSE (Mental Status Examination) schedule is interesting and brings out the inadequacy of such standardised tools.

Chapters like 'Alzheimer's hell' and 'Knowledge, practice and the bad family' are crucial to his work. We get an elaborate, detailed and careful analysis of a vast range of literature (including the updated and hardcore biological writings) that maps the debates that constitute Alzheimer's. This is a brilliant piece that captures the cultural history of aging vis-à-vis Alzheimer's in the USA and stimulates queries about its percolation through a colonial and postcolonial mediation in the reader's mind. As a logical consequence, the reader is offered explanations to those questions through a complex category called the 'bad family'. Cohen's review of what he calls the *Aging in India series*, which marks the coming of modern gerontology in India, is interesting. Cohen says: 'The modern disciplines of *Aging in India* does not create the suffering old person... what

is created is an effort at hegemony, a universalization of a particular set of interpretations of the figure, rooted in the responses of urban elites and petty-bourgeoisie to questions of identity within the colonial milieu' (p. 120).

In the following chapters, Cohen deals with the issues of memory, the 'mal-adjustment' theories (though his use of the category 'bourgeois' in this chapter is more rhetorical than explanatory), the context of 'Rishis', his dense ethnographies of the Nagwa slum, the relation between dogs and old woman/mad woman, and finally 'the body in time'. In all of these he uses innovatively and authoritatively his fieldwork experiences at Calcutta, Delhi, Pune and of course Varanasi, to weave his narrative through a complex set of issues at multiple levels. The category of *ghar kali* (it should be *ghor koli* as *ghar* may imply 'house' and Kali, the famous Hindu goddess!), as depicted in a 19th-century Calcutta *patua* work where the weakness of a Bengali *babu* is described, becomes a key concept that runs through this book. The idea of bad times (*koli*) after *satya yuga* offers many explanations to implicate senility and old bodies that run through times in India.

Cohen has organised his chapters nicely, each one preceded by a short piece giving the reader an anecdote with an apt title. One of the strengths of his analysis is that, despite his repeated reference to the works of McKim Marriott and his reliance on Arthur Kleinman's 'what is at stake', he successfully avoids the trap of structuralism and does not appear 'fashionably postmodern', giving himself sufficient scope to defend the 'other modern things' in his subtitle. However, much of Cohen's non-modern India is Hindu India and he ignores the discourses on aging/senility from the other cultures of the subcontinent. His prose also appears repetitive at times, and quotations preceding chapters and sections are in abundance! He has tried consciously not to be totalitarian, yet his desire to become such is not nullified completely. But one must appreciate his use of Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi and Sanskrit, and his gripping story-telling.

This is a representative text for students of medical anthropology who would like to continue the critical discourse of medical models Cohen has established. For mental health professionals who work with old persons, it should be part of their course-work.

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AMIT RANJAN BASU

PETER GODWIN, ed., *The looming epidemic: The impact of HIV and AIDS in India*. New Delhi: Mosaic Books, 1998. x + 190 pp. Tables, figures, maps, notes, references, index. Rs. 450 (hardback).

The looming epidemic provides an outline of the impending impact of the rapidly spreading HIV/AIDS epidemic in India by focusing on the main areas in which the impact of the epidemic will be felt and the need for immediate attention to address these issues. It details some of the critical areas in which basic

social welfare infrastructure will be threatened by the increased morbidity and mortality associated with the epidemic. Here, the authors make the point that while prime-age adult mortality is increasing as a result of HIV infection, few of these deaths are recorded or even recognised as HIV-related. Yet, because prime-age adult mortality rates are normally low, relatively small increases in absolute numbers of deaths produce relatively large changes in these rates, and make clear the importance of planning for impact alleviation for the millions already infected.

Other chapters in this edited book use admission data from some hospitals (and the changes in the patterns of mortality and morbidity which they reflect) to monitor the spread of HIV. Not only will this be a useful monitoring tool, bypassing the complexities and ethical difficulties of testing for HIV, but it will also be an important planning tool for health authorities, to help them adjust resources to respond to changing hospital needs.

Other chapters examine and compare the impact of the epidemic on the private sector and rural India with Africa, where the impact of the epidemic on farming systems is now more clearly established. They suggest a significantly different pattern of both epidemic development and of long-term social and economic impact from that observed in Africa based on a micro-view of a rural area in Rajasthan.

Last, the gender differential with regard to vulnerability to AIDS is discussed and the need to accommodate this analysis within policy and programmes for women's reproductive health is emphasised.

This book tries to incorporate every issue that needs to be considered when one is talking of the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in India.

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PETER VAN DER VEER and HARTMUT LEHMANN, eds., *Nation and religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. vii + 231 pp. Map, notes, bibliography, index. $55.00 (hardback).

The present collection of eleven essays spread across four nations—India, Japan, Britain and the Netherlands—seeks to examine the developments in religion and nationalism in different contexts. It also seeks to understand the multiple relations arising between secularity, religiosity and nationhood across the colonial divide.

Traditionally accepted relations between religion and nationalism are questioned, and the role of the ideas of language, race and history in creating national identity are discussed. Three broad themes are the focus of the various essays: the nationalisation of religion in the modern era; the relation between secular and religious nationalism; and the ways in which the violent past of religious communities or a nation is legitimised through commemorative rituals and institutionalised mourning.

The discussions in the initial four essays by Peter van der Veer, Hugh Mcleod, Susan Bayly and Peter van Rooden focus on questions regarding modernising religion and emerging nationalism: the notion that Western nations are secular because they are modern, and Asian states are hung between tradition and modernity.

Van der Veer's essay, 'Victorian Britain and British India' (Chap. 2) compares the structural similarities and differences between the development of religion and nationalism in Britain and India. He critiques the idea that the decline of religion was a mark of modernity. For him, the rise and growth of evangelicalism and the inclusion and enfranchisement of Catholics brought religion and nation together in Britain and created a missionary zeal. The latter realised itself in the spread of the empire and the rise of a similar faith in India through movements of the genre of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj. How these led to nationalist identification could have been developed further.

Mcleod (Chap. 3) analyses the role of Protestantism in the formation of British national identity. He is critical of already established work on the forging of the British nation and points to the role of 'the empire' in establishing a national identity for the Anglo-Saxon and Protestant race as superior and as an instrument of providence.

Bayly (Chap. 4) traces the developments in racial theory and understanding of race in Britain and India, where the nation is defined as a union of racially compatible people who derive their sense of purpose from religion. Like van der Veer, she also looks at the constructive role played by social movements and their play on racial purity in the invoking of a national identity.

Van Rooden (Chap. 5), like Mcleod, distinguishes his discussion on history, religion and nation in the Netherlands from already established work on the history of the Dutch reformed church. Not only did the church establish high standards for its members, but the history of the nation lay in upholding the religious order. The ethnicising of religious differences laid the base for modern Dutch politics. Stress is also laid on the nation's role in upholding the moral community.

Frans Groot's essay (Chap. 9) on national festivals and the role of public commemoration and participation in nation building provides a balance in understanding how the nation is expected to uphold and integrate the community. These cultural events do not just bring people together but also bring out the differences between them, thus enabling an interplay between nation building and religious pluriformity.

Partha Chatterjee (Chap. 6) writes on the two episodes of partition (1905/1947) that shaped Bengal. He looks at how relations between different religious communities changed in the process of constructing new national identities along linguistic and religious lines and a cultural reconstruction of the idea of selfhood.

In Chapter 7, Barbara Metcalf highlights the importance of movements in pre-independence India, such as the pietist Tablighi Jama'at in shaping history

and the ideas of modernity and secularism in a quest for nationhood. Such movements represented counter-narratives to nationalism and provided a significant space to Islam in the political imagination of the non-Muslim communities in India.

Like Chapter 9 on the public commemoration of past events in the Netherlands, Harry Harootunian engages with the question of national responsibility for historical events that may have damaged a nation's psyche. The Netherlands commemorates and Japan enshrines the war dead to help the nation accept, through religion, moral responsibility for its failures. National identity through religion and rituals at the Yasukuni shrine helps a nation reunite with religion in post-war Japan, not through secularisation but sacralisation.

The collection of diverse essays comes full circle with Talal Asad (Chap. 9) raising questions similar to van der Veer's (Chap. 2) on whether, with modernity, religion becomes increasingly privatised and secular. He in fact criticises secularisation theories arguing that enough time is not spent on understanding what the 'secular' itself means. For him the secular is the ground where the religious and political are separated, but being secular does not make a movement nationalist. Asad rightly laments the lack of an anthropology of the secular. The question remains: where in today's ever-changing definition of secular does one find such explorable ground?

The finale is provided by Benedict Anderson, short and sarcastic, on the 'Goodness of nations' and the many ways in which this goodness is culturally anchored and restored in the world of the living—in celibate movements and infantile innocence that 'guarantee the country's ultimate goodness' (p. 201)—and in the world of the dead through memorialisation, which makes all the dead equal, innocent martyrs, not murderers, because 'Death has paid their moral bills and cleared their books' (p. 202). The memorial to the unknown soldier represents a national symbol reminding everyone of their moral responsibility, 'helping to ensure that, however momentarily wrong, our country is really always right' (p. 202).

An excellent collection of essays both in style and content, the volume raises several sensitive questions on significant issues which should provoke public debate. However, the many typographical errors are a real disappointment, especially in a volume produced by the Princeton University Press!

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SIMON R. CHARSLEY and G.K. KARANTH, eds., *Challenging untouchability: Dalit initiative and experience from Karnataka.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. Cultural subordination and Dalit challenge, vol. 1. 323 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, glossary, index. Rs. 245 (paperback).

Following a classical anthropological tradition, this book offers a serious and readable account of the struggles for self-assertion as well as the unyielding deprivation

of various rural dalit communities in Karnataka. The result of a collaborative effort between the Department of Sociology in the University of Glasgow (Scotland) and the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, the book has been divided into three parts. The first, containing two chapters, provides an overview of the role of the state and other socio-political movements in changing the conditions of these communities and a useful summary of the various discourses on caste that have dotted the Indian sociological landscape during the last fifty years. The second, and more substantive, part contains detailed anthropological studies of seven Karnataka villages by five different scholars including the two editors of the book. Three of these villages are located in the southern part of the state sharing a border with Tamil Nadu. Three other villages are clustered in the central part of the state bordering Andhra, and the last one is situated in the northern belt close to the Maharashtrian town of Kolhapur. The third and last part of the book recapitulates the main findings and offers some reflections on the various strategies for social mobility adopted by dalit communities and their wider implications for Indian society. Unable to deal with each contribution separately, I propose to outline briefly the strengths of the book and end with a few queries.

There is a rich variety of dalit communities (jatis) covered in the study: Holeyas, Madigas, Madars, Thigala Holeyas, Adi-Karnatakas, Korachas (originally a nomadic tribe), Harijans and Samagars. In an attempt to distance themselves from the degrading connotations attached by upper castes to the original jati names, many communities have discarded these names and found other identity-markers. The studies remain silent about the use of the term 'dalit' by these communities. The caste composition of the selected villages varies from a single caste, to one in which the dalit community faces a 'dominant' caste (Okkaligas, Lingayats), to another in which there is a multi-caste structure. While the identification of these 'village-models' with different regions and histories is well argued, the distinction brought about in the last chapter between 'multiple caste' villages and 'graded caste' communities seems somewhat contrived

There are two aspects of the anthropological analyses carried out in the second part that merit attention and praise. The first deals with the sensitive description of the separate cultural (and religious) life of these dalit communities. The studies succeed in portraying the variety of colours and shades filling the large canvas depicting the relationships, ambiguous at times, entered into by dalits and non-dalits in the course of celebrating village festivals. The second aspect refers to the absorbing description of the role of economic factors in shaping the identity of dalit communities. Most of the studies underline the losing battle of dalits in clinging to land. In some cases, their land has been transferred to upper caste communities (p. 96), in other cases they have been prevented from buying land, and in one case dalit families, after a protracted struggle, were allotted grazing land for cultivation. Readers interested in the role of dalit entrepreneurship will find excellent case studies on a variety of ventures (rope-making, silk-reeling and chappal-making) based on traditional skills and their impact on changing the social status of these communities.

I find the book wanting in three areas. While recording faithfully the female names of dalit goddesses worshipped in each of the seven villages, the study does not delve into the gender implications of this important cultural trait. More attention to other gender issues could have enhanced a book already rich in ethnographic material. One of the stated objectives of the book is to examine the role that new forms of dalit mobilisation have played in raising their awareness. My second set of queries is related precisely to this issue. The seven studies provide scanty evidence of the existence of these dalit organisations. The activities of young members belonging to Ambedkar Sanghas are mentioned in two villages (pp. 127, 227), but the incidents described appear peripheral to the life of the community. The Dalit Sangarsh Samiti (DSS) receives some attention in two other villages: in one, the DSS representative is 'regarded by most as a nuisance' (p. 104), and in the other the DSS 'has only a nominal presence' (p. 174). In the last village surveyed, there is a passing reference to some dalit leader belonging to the BSP. Notwithstanding the specific mention in the first part (p. 69) of the role played in Karnataka by dalit organisations, the 'absence', in the second part, of a proper analysis of their role in mobilising rural dalit communities is intriguing. The authors are either unwilling to deal with the failure of these predominantly urban dalit organisations in influencing their rural counterparts, or they were not particularly concerned to consider the 'presence/absence of dalit organisations' as one of the criteria for the selection of these villages. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the study fails to offer a clear picture of the criteria followed in choosing the seven villages.

These critical remarks do not in any way intend to obscure the contribution of the book in documenting and analysing the life of these dalit communities in Karnataka. Both scholars and lay persons interested in dalit studies will find the reading enjoyable, instructive and challenging. To add a final twist, I would have personally liked the term 'Brahminical' to have been used oftener to describe the cultural universe of upper castes. But, alas, this term may be considered too loaded ideologically!

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K.L. Sharma, *Social stratification in India: Issues and themes*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997. 218 pp. References, index. Rs. 295 (hardback)/Rs. 165 (paperback).

This book constitutes a survey of literature on social stratification for the period 1979 to 1989. The author has tried to 'broaden the temporal scope of the study by including some relevant literature on the theme before and after the stipulated period'. He emphasises 'the understanding and explanation of the ideology, structure and process of social inequality both temporally and contextually'. The book is divided into eight chapters, exploring the interface of social stratification with

such aspects as culture, gender, rural-agrarian setting, urban-industrial society, and weaker sections of society.

To study the theoretical and methodological issues of stratification, the author does not review the works of sociology alone but draws from other disciplines such as economics, political science, anthropology and history, as social stratification is a multi-causal and multifaceted phenomenon and requires multidisciplinary analysis and understanding. He constantly hammers home the point that no single concept is adequate to understand the mechanism of stratification in India. One has to combine the concepts of caste, class and power to have a clear picture, He calls it the caste–class–power nexus approach. He particularly stresses the non-exclusive character of caste in understanding Indian society, arguing that caste as an encompassing system is a myth. Economic and political factors such as property holding, the land tenure system, political authority at the local and regional levels, and education and legal provisions have substantially influenced the social ranking of groups apart from ritual ranking. Invasions and migrations have also affected the social ranking of groups.

In the context of social stratification in an urban-industrial setting, the author mentions rural bias as the main obstruction to industrialisation in India (p. 89). But he does not elaborate on the concept of rural bias. The understanding of nexus along the rural–urban continuum remains unclear. This is a shortcoming which one encounters throughout the book. Sharma begins discussing an issue, but never gives details of the literature reviewed for that purpose. He rarely analyses the works. He briefly describes the studies and stops there. It does not whet the reader's appetite.

The author rightly says that social formation is determined by the traditional social structure. The select group controls the positions of power, prestige and responsibility. He also delineates entrepreneurship as a stratum of society, and argues that it has now spread to such diverse fields as medicine, teaching, science and government service.

While discussing the linkage of stratification with weaker sections of society, Sharma brings up the same points that have been discussed and debated innumerable times before. When he points out that reservation policy has not ameliorated the socio-economic and political situation of the SCs, that there is growth of elites among the SCs who corner the benefits, or that the elite tribes are closer to non-tribals than to their own groups, the reader may feel that nothing new is being said.

The author emphasises gender as a component of social stratification. He laments that gender as an element of stratification theory has been ignored, and adds that five main areas of stratification, i.e., the individual, the family, the household, the division of labour between sexes, social classes and nation states, have influenced and have been influenced by gender (p. 134). He quotes Omvedt, who says that women do not constitute a collectivity with shared interests and needs in Indian society, which is already divided by social hierarchy and economic inequality. Their caste and class location has worsened the status of Dalit women, who suffer from the triple oppressions of caste, class and gender.

However, the author has ignored age as a dimension of stratification. Age is an important component of stratification—societies typically arrange themselves into a hierarchy of socially defined age-grades or strata, with obligations and prerogatives assigned to members as they move from one stratum to the next. Persons of different age categories are differently viewed and treated in all societies. Age tends to qualify and disqualify people for desired roles and privileged positions. It would not have been out of place if the author had devoted a subsection of the book to this important aspect of social stratification.

Sharma makes certain points in the book which are in the nature of conclusions. One: caste, class and power are in themselves not sufficient to understand the mechanism of social inequality; rather, it is the cluster of these factors that can explain contemporary social dynamics. Two: change is not only in the system but also of the system. He also infers that the state has played a crucial role in shaping and reshaping the socio-economic and political arrangements. One of the significant inferences is that, instead of 'caste and class', the phrase 'class and caste' has been in vogue to signify class as the dominant dimension of social stratification relegating caste to a secondary position. The author repeatedly speaks of a new stratification system which has replaced the traditional social hierarchy brought about by multiple factors such as land reforms, abolition of feudalism, the green revolution, politicisation of caste, reforms initiated by the Indian state and the reservation policy. The new social order is characterised by the dominance of political power and better economic standing. This determines the status of any group in India. He believes that despite the emergence of this new form of stratification, the legal system, constitutional provisions and social movements have succeeded in lessening social inequality in India.

Despite its limitations, the book is a useful contribution to the existing literature on social stratification. The strength of the book lies in its ability to document rich source material on aspects of social inequality. It succeeds in placing before the readers the essential arguments pertaining to theoretical and methodological issues on the Indian stratification system. Apart from students of sociology, it will be a useful book for students of Indian society, particularly for those who want an introduction to patterns of social stratification in India.

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur ANINDYA JAYANTA MISHRA

PAUL HOCKINGS, *Kindreds of the earth: Badaga household structure and demography*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 302 pp. Tables, figures, plates, maps, notes, references, index. Rs. 395 (hardback).

This book is a sequel to an earlier publication of Paul Hockings, *Ancient Hindu refugees: Badaga social history 1550–1975* (1980, The Hague and New York: Mouton Publishers; New Delhi: Vikas). It closely follows up the theme of household life and development in Badaga society which was first laid out in the previous book. Hockings's first acquaintance with the Badagas was in 1962–63 as

a graduate student of anthropology. What began then as a piece of exploratory research became a passion which he has pursued for more than three decades. This work is a culmination of nine-yearly censuses (in 1963, 1972, 1981 and 1990) and deep study of four sample villages representing hierarchically differentiated strata of Badaga society. Nearly all persons living during the period of study in the villages, amounting to one generation of about twenty-six years of cultural change, are included in the meticulously developed database. The distinctive longitudinal study broadly measures structural changes in family and household, the age and sex composition of the population, natality, fertility, morbidity and mortality.

Structurally, the book consists of twelve chapters grouped into four parts: 'The Badaga household in context'; 'Life and death in the household'; 'Quantitative findings'; and 'Modern life: Work and the mass media'. These are overlaid by an introduction, and a foreword by John C. Caldwell which places the contents of the book in perspective. This study employs demography as an entry point into Badaga lifestyle and thought patterns. Subsistence, kinship, marriage, descent, population structure and even funeral rites have been studied in depth.

One of the chief concerns here is with modernisation, a phenomenon which the author defines as a 'communication process wherein traditional peasant populations acquire and use more education and more information about the nation-state in which they live. As a result their orientations towards the outside world change, and their attitudes towards urban cultures raise new possibilities in their mind' (p. 255). The definition, though carefully worded, is fraught with ambiguity inherent in the phrase 'more information about the nation-state'. Here, 'what' and 'how much' of information about the nation-state is regarded as symptomatic of modernisation, remains unclear. What is the threshold of modernisation? Later in the book, Hockings seems to equate modernisation with urbanisation. A logical concomitant of Hockings's essentialist position on modernisation as urbanisation is that all urban people are modern. Juxtaposing this with the definition of modernisation cited here leads to the deduction that all urbanites use education and information about the nation-state in which they live. Both propositions are debatable.

An important observation with wide implications is that, among the Badagas, modernisation, which has irrevocably gripped the economy and society, does not have to do with industrialisation as much as with commercialisation of agriculture and plantations. In this context, modernisation calls for optimising resources, imbibing the values of the urban people, emulating their lifestyle, as also participating in the mass media of the nation. Traditional farming is losing worth as tea plantations require cheaply hired pluckers rather than intensive family labour. People remain on the lookout for opportunities of education and employment in cities. Quite naturally, there is tension between the centripetal forces of tradition and the centrifugal forces of modernity, so well brought out in the narrative of M.N. Thesingh. Named after a mythical warrior, Thesingh

fought several inner battles and tensions accruing from the restrictions imposed by his grandmother on his aspiration for the higher education which would require him to move out of the hills. His grandmother refused to send him to Chennai because of her own anxiety that she would not have a male member of the family to perform the funeral rites if she died while Thesingh was away. Thesingh spent a major part of his life cultivating potatoes. Ironically, his grandson became the first member of the family to acquire a college education. This is the power of social change and transformation!

The author succinctly analyses the fallout of the rising demand for education and employment in cities. What emerges is an elite group or 'new middle class' marked by urban lifestyle, surplus capital and progressive attitude. The newly acquired wealth is invariably invested in purchasing or constructing houses and equipping them with furniture and other objects of convenience. A more damaging repercussion is the rush to lead the lifestyle of urbanites in the village itself. This erodes the cultural ethos gradually.

Admittedly, there are positive outcomes of the ideological borrowing from towns and cities, such as (*a*) the growing awareness of health and welfare particularly among the youth; and (*b*) the considerable decline in mortality and morbidity, making the family planning programmes of the government fruitful. One of the more important findings of Hockings is that women, though many of them are illiterate, now negotiate their reproductive choices In fact, women in the four villages have voluntarily reduced their fertile years by an average of 3.4 from the older cohort born before 1930 to the younger cohort born after that year. Now that the survival rate of children has increased, and so also the cost of bringing them up, more and more women are supporting the small family norm.

The other side of the modernising process is the splitting up of joint families into nuclear households. The author uses his hindsight to explain the phenomenon: the breaking up is an effect not only of the family population swelling beyond the spatial capacity of the house, but also of the giving up of agriculture in many households. The household, in addition to being a reproductive unit, was hitherto an economic unit. The joint family distributed the tasks of ploughing, weeding, seeding, guarding, harvesting, processing and cooking food as also child and animal care among its members. When agriculture came to be surrendered for employment in factories, offices, schools and hospitals, the interests and timetables of the members became so diverse that it was no longer possible to remain in the joint household. The separation is catalysed by educated or urbanised wives who argue that the earnings of their husbands should justifiably be spent on their own children rather than be shared with other members of the joint family.

The mass media has had a large role to play in the modernisation of the Badagas. Newspapers, television and films have all left an indelible impact on Badaga society. Amidst change and transformation of lifestyle, Badagas are deeply aware that their own identity is at stake. They strongly assert their ethnic identity by upholding rigorous rules of community endogamy and communicating in their

own language. Just how effectively they will be able to withstand the winds of transformation cannot be ascertained at this stage. All that one can do is watch the twists and turns that Badaga society takes over a period of time.

The book is indeed a product of precision: each concept is defined, there are comprehensive tables, maps, figures and plates. Despite the inconsistency in the numbering of some photographs and their references in the text, the presentation of data is impressive. This work would have been tremendously enriched if (*a*) the social matrix of the Badagas was explained in terms of their relationship and interaction with the Todas, Irulas and Kurumbas with whom they share the Nilgiris; and (*b*) indigenous, even if inaccurate, conceptions of demography in terms of methods of regulating birth, natality and determining population structure were discussed. However, even in its present form this book will be of special interest to anthropologists, demographers, health planners, policy makers and sociologists.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts NITA MATHUR
New Delhi

URMILA PINGLE and CHRISTOPH VON FURER-HAIMENDORF, *Tribal cohesion in the Godavari valley*. Hyderabad: Booklins Corporation, 1998. xiii + 171 pp. Tables, figures, maps, glossary, index. Rs. 200 (paperback).

Dr. Urmila Pingle is a medical doctor, with a Ph.D. in population genetics, who works with a voluntary organisation in Andhra Pradesh. Between 1972 and 1992 she travelled extensively with the late Professor Furer-Haimendorf through the tribal areas of the Godavari valley, learning anthropology from him in the apprentice mode. Although Dr. Pingle shares authorial credit with her teacher, how much of the writing was done by him is left unclear.

We have here wide-ranging reportage on numerous tribal societies, especially from Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh and Bastar in Madhya Pradesh: their ecological settings, land use practices, beliefs, folklore, and much else; and their changing life situations in interaction with other tribal and caste groups, and varied strategies for coping with relentless pressure from plainsmen. And there is also a ten-page interlude on shifting cultivation in north-east India, based on Pingle's participation in several workshops there in 1988. The text is loaded with detail which could be of interest to people living in the region, outsiders working among them, and also future researchers.

Delhi SATISH SABERWAL

BERTHOLD KUHN, *Participatory development in rural India*. Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1998. xxii + 313 pp. Tables, maps, notes, appendix, bibliography, glossary, index. Rs. 600 (hardback).

The book under review has been conceived against the backdrop of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment on Panchayati Raj reforms. Its primary objective is

to empirically assess the social and political dynamics of local self-government institutions. In particular, it examines the institutional potentialities of Panchayati Raj as a vehicle of participatory development. To this end, it bases itself on 'intensive' case studies of six Gram Panchayats in the Udaipur district of Rajasthan. It is rich in factual detail and contains some valuable data, like the 'Election schedule for Panchayats in the states and union territories' (pp. 102–4). However, its merit lies in its critique of 'project-oriented' participation models such as NGOs, user groups and self-help groups. It argues that the institutionalised political participation of the poor at the level of Panchayats is the best developmental strategy. In other words, participatory development and political empowerment are intricately linked. Thus, the politicisation of Panchayats augments the 'negotiating powers' of the poor vis-à-vis state-controlled bureaucracy.

The book is well researched and neatly organised. However, given its orientation to an international audience, some of its chapters produce a sense of déjà vu in an Indian reader. On another plane, it typifies an analytical super-enthusiasm on the basis of a relatively thin database.

Goa University MANISH KUMAR THAKUR

M.L. Dantwala, Harsh Sethi and Pravin Visaria, eds., *Social change through voluntary action*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. 199 pp. Tables, notes, references, index. Rs. 175 (paperback).

Voluntary action and voluntarism are deeply entrenched in the Indian ethos, traditions and beliefs. In recent times, while on the one hand voluntarism as well as socio-political values are declining due to various socio-economic changes, on the other hand the failure of the state to deliver the goods and the incessant flow of capital have led to the mushrooming of voluntary organisations. Against this backdrop, the book under review sheds light on the theoretical, conceptual and empirical aspects of voluntary action in India.

The objective of the book is to depict voluntary action as a 'combative' as well as a 'constructive' force which can strive for a better society. The book consists of twelve chapters, of which six outline various theoretical and conceptual aspects of voluntary action, while the other six describe the success stories of selected voluntary organisations.

The introductory chapter gives a summary of the book, where the editors emphasise the significance of voluntary action as well as of 'value based development'. They conceive of India as passing through a turbulent phase, and suggest that voluntary action is the need of the hour to overcome the crisis.

In a well-argued article, Dantwala, while pointing out the ongoing socio-economic imbalances, the glaring economic disparities, and the blurred vision of egalitarianism, feels that there is an urgent need for the restoration of values in public life. He argues that India has not achieved the desired socio-economic development because of the flaws in the methods/strategies it adopts. Furthermore, the apathy of the government machinery towards developmental

programmes at the grassroots is an added problem. Therefore, a sustained and committed effort should be unleashed by voluntary organisations (VOs) to address the prevailing socio-economic problems. Voluntary organisations can play a dual role by helping the government machinery to reach the vulnerable section, and also by criticising wrong policies/programmes unrelentingly.

In Chapter 3, Rohini Patel observes that India provides a conducive environment for the rise and growth of VOs because of its rich tradition as well as liberal democratic regime. Discussing the importance of theories, i.e., contract failure, subsidy, exchange, etc., to understand voluntary organisations, she also calls upon academia to study voluntary organisations from a holistic perspective.

Chapters 10 and 11 discuss non-governmental organisation (NGO) accountability vis-à-vis government sector accountability. The authors (Ramachandran and Sethi respectively) call for financial accountability and transparency for NGOs to regain their shrinking credibility. Analysing accountability in the changing socio-political domain, the authors contend that the inherent constraints of VOs, the fund assessment mechanism, and the hostile environment in which they operate should also be looked at.

In a significant chapter, Rajni Kothari defines voluntary action as a 'way of life'. Holding political parties responsible for the lukewarm response to the people's cause, he argues for a 'non party political process' thereby opting for a strong, viable civil society. He castigates the capitalist/corporate mode of development that has opened the doors to the inflow of foreign money that has resulted in an NGO boom. The unprecedented growth of NGOs hinders the spirit of voluntarism. Focusing on the prospects of VOs, he contends that their future lies not only in acceptance by the people at the grassroots but also the disadvantaged section's response/reaction to them. 'Eternal vigilance' is the key to the rise and growth of a 'new voluntarism', the true voluntarism, he concludes.

Six case studies of voluntary organisations covering six different issues point out their achievements, strategies and approaches. These have been selected from both rural and urban settings. Chapter 4 is about how values of religion based on humanity could bring about social transformation. Swadhyaya in Gujarat has been successful in organising and involving people in various reform activities. Chapter 5 portrays the committed, motivated leadership of Anna Hazare, who managed to bring about a change in the crisis-ridden village of Ralegaon Siddhi in Maharashtra through his sustained campaign against alcoholism, dowry, superstition and gender discrimination. Chapter 6 lists out certain parameters, i.e., people's participation, technical excellence, cost effectiveness, concern for equality, sustainability and accountability for the effective functioning of NGOs. Applying these criteria, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and Kundla Taluka Gram Sewa Mandal (KTGSM) have been working successfully in community development programmes. Chapter 7 shows how the National Institute of Rural Integrated Development (NIRID) in Mumbai has won back the trust and confidence of innocent tribals and conveyed to them that collective effort will pay. By undertaking plantation

programmes, it has helped not only in eradicating poverty but also in arresting local environmental degradation. Chapter 8 gives an account of Sumangali Seva Ashram in Bangalore, which is working for women's socio-economic empowerment and fighting against atrocities on women by participating in protest actions and demonstrations. Chapter 9 deals with the success story of SEWA, which primarily sets itself two goals, i.e., full employment, and self-reliance for all its members.

In selecting these case studies, the editors seem to have confined themselves to the western and southern regions of India. Broader coverage would have allowed them to argue that VOs are effective across regional boundaries. Besides, the volume would have been comprehensive had there been a chapter on 'Civil society', and why it should be considered as the 'first sector' in place of the state.

Lucidly written, this book will be useful for scholars interested in voluntary research. Students and scholars in sociology, social work, development studies and political science will also benefit from this timely book. Members of voluntary organisations will be enthused by the success stories in this book.

Indian Institute of Technology BISWAMBHAR PANDA
Kanpur

JONATHAN BARKER ET AL., *Street-level democracy: Political settings at the margins of global power*. Ontario: Between the Lines, 1999. viii + 279 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. $24.95 (paperback)

AND

MARILYN CARR, MARTHA CHEN and RENANA JHABVALA, eds., *Speaking out: Women's economic empowerment in South Asia*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1997. xiv + 238 pp. Tables, plates, notes, references, bibliography, glossary. Rs. 250 (paperback).

Both the books under review attempt to look at social movements at the grassroots level in the contemporary global context. While the book by Carr et al. focuses only on the women's movements in South Asia, the one by Barker examines varying kinds of micro-level social movements from the political settings perspective, the latter definitely qualifying for a greater theoretical coherence. The case studies in both books by and large come from the less developed countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Uganda, Sri Lanka and Nicaragua, except one case study comparing the political spaces in England and the US.

The authors of *Speaking out* must be congratulated for the successful achievement of their objective, i.e., 'to provide NGOs and WOs in South Asia with an opportunity to examine their experiences of organizing for women's empowerment within a common analytical framework; and to identify varied strategies working best under specific circumstances'. The case study of AKRSP in North Pakistan by Malik and Kallender, of BRAC in Bangladesh by Selim, and of JMS

and LMS in Bangladesh by Rashid and Shahabuddin highlight the coming up of women's organisations and cooperatives. These case studies share the common experiences of Muslim women, traditionally in purdah, and subsequently coming out of it, becoming financially productive members of their families and societies at large; and finally, carving a niche for themselves in the social, psychological, economic and political space, along with their male counterparts. The remaining case studies in this book are from India and Sri Lanka. Placed in slightly better circumstances due to cultural differences, these women's organisations have been able to build environment where cooperatives can flourish as decentralised, democratic, self-help and mutual aid organisations. A major achievement of these movements is the acquisition of management skills by women, thus enhancing their bargaining capacity both in the market as well as in other social situations. One observation standing out in all the case studies is the non-confrontationist approach adopted by the women's groups, leading to the generalisation that in a patriarchal set-up it is logically more effective to carry their men along rather than sidelining them. All the organisations had been initiated by men, to be taken over subsequently by the women. The indispensability of males in the formative years of these grassroots organisations owes itself to the inability of women to handle marketing which involves a considerable amount of public dealing apart from mobility. The analysis thus contributes towards suggesting the domains where women can venture more successfully and with greater ease.

The objective of Barker in writing *Street-level democracy* is to counter the generally negative reporting by media about the less developed countries by demonstrating, through diverse case studies, that people are taking concrete steps to turn things around. The book focuses upon the analysis of local action connecting it with the analysis of global forces of change. The six studies of nine different locales are presented coherently in a highly comparative fashion within a common theoretical framework of *political settings*. Pointing out the flaws in (*a*) resource mobilisation theory and (*b*) cultural identities theory of social movements, the authors consistently demonstrate the ability of the political settings perspective to reveal the multifaceted origin, formation and strategic functioning of various organisations in highly contextualised and localised settings. Barker defines political settings as 'collective actions', each political setting having its own unique location in space and time and its own spatial and temporal address.

The case study of three development agencies in Nigeria by Shettima, the research on government control over social space in two towns of England and the US by Barker, and the survey of an urban market in Uganda by Gombay can be clubbed together for some common, and important, inferences drawn by them. One, a greater expansion of political settings, participation and empowerment occurs in cultural and political spaces which are more pluralistic and less autocratic Two, the nature of the public sphere mirrors social differences including gender, class and ethnicity, placing barriers to participation for women,

marginalised cultural groups and politically subordinate strata, Further, the varying patterns of political settings between rural and urban contexts are depicted in the study of mosques in Pakistan by Cwikowski. In this very interesting analysis, the author traces the change in the Islamic discourse taking place in mosques from a legitimisation of the prevailing political establishment to its critique and rejection. In all these studies, the movements gaining strength had focused primarily on localised and highly contextualised issues; however, the political settings are being globalised, along with the globalisation of political economy.

Both these books bring out the centrality of livelihood issues in political action, both for women's as well as other organisations. By bringing out the highly diverse case studies from varied regions, with vast cultural, economic and political differences, these works provide the reader with a valuable insight into the origin, development and prioritisation of these movements. The authors could have done a still better job by examining how these social organisations, initially emerging as extremely democratic and participatory political settings, may gradually take on most of the characteristics of the opaque political space within which they are situated. In other words, these movements must be analysed processually, looking not only at how they open up avenues for marginalised people, but also at the power structures which eventually grow within these movements, displacing the transparency and participation in the process.

These books provide valuable empirical insight into the people's movements originating at the local level over local issues, ultimately creating political space for the participants beyond their local, contextualised boundaries. They are a must for researchers interested in gender empowerment, social movements, organisational structure and policy options.

RAJESH GILL

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JOHN ROBERT SHOTTON, *Learning and freedom: Policy, pedagogy and paradigms in Indian education and schooling*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. 209 pp. Tables, figures, references, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 295 (hardback).

If universal elementary education (UEE) is our national goal, the priorities hitherto do not reflect it in terms of action plans. However, the philosophical traditions, the initiation of new approaches in terms of an alternative pedagogy, and the support of Indian governments for the same will no doubt allow us to move towards the goal of UEE. This is the central theme of the book.

'Scanning educational provisions' in Chapter 1, the author is quick to focus attention on 'A new departure in Indian education' in Chapter 2. In the author's opinion, a new departure consists of a move away from existing educational facilities and approaches to a newer approach in terms of contextual, specialised, need-based knowledge, which is implemented in terms of an active rather than passive teaching–learning process. Besides, it should be child-centred The

newer approach must encourage freedom. An extremely long Chapter 3 of about 100 pages covers learner-centred literacy projects such as Jan Vigyan Manch, Bihar, and various total literacy campaigns; rural-based development education schemes such as Charvaha Vidyalaya, Turki, Bihar; PROPEL, Maharashtra; Shiksha Karmi Project, Rajasthan; Lok Jumbish Project, Rajasthan; and experimental schemes. International experiences of education for self-reliance, production and functional literacy are also briefly narrated. The penultimate chapter then argues strongly in favour of an education system that nurtures freedom in acquiring basic skills, that encourages learners to establish relationships with nature, society, the world and the universe. Its basis should be social and moral, and one that ensures the three 'C's of successful education—curiosity, courage and confidence.

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SUDHANSHU BHUSHAN

AMRITA BASU, ed., *The challenge of local feminisms: Women's movements in global perspective*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999. xiv + 493 pp. Plates, notes, bibliography, index. Rs. 350 (paperback)

AND

IRENE GUIJT and MEERA KAUL SHAH, eds., *The myth of community: Gender issues in participatory development*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications. 1999. xx + 288 pp. Tables, figures, notes, references, index. Rs. 295 (paperback).

Where does one begin to write a history of women's struggles? Popularly, women's suffrage and national liberation have been two markers of the so-called First Wave feminist movements, while the Second Wave has been marked largely by the rise of autonomous women's groups in the North as well as in some postcolonial countries, most notably in India. In analysing women's struggles, we have frequently taken recourse to a chronological classification of women's activism into phases, assuming the universality of both the chronology as well as the classification.

However, a cursory reading of the historiographies of women's movements across the world contained in *The challenge of local feminisms* points to the inapplicability of any universal typology to women's struggles and feminist activism. This book retraces, retrieves and recovers the histories of women organising in diverse cultures against diverse political regimes, using diverse strategies, and focusing on diverse issues. What we have as a result is a quilt that contains a patterned history, the pattern at once striking and coded, compelling the reader to follow the multitudinous paths in order to decipher the history.

Around 1910, women workers in Chile began organising systematically on both class and gender issues, in the process forcing political parties to reckon with women's concerns. Autonomous organising in Kenya goes back to the Mau Mau war of 1952, when women in Central Kenya broke away in protest

from the most influential African political group of the time, the Agikuyu Central Association, to form the Mumbi Central Association, named after the mythical mother of the Agikuyu. The Women's League of the African National Congress along with the Federation of South African Women led the national anti-pass campaign in South Africa in the 1950s, part of which was the historic march of twenty thousand women in Pretoria.

While women in South Africa played a critical role in the anti-apartheid struggle, for women in Peru, Chile and the Philippines, coming together meant resisting military regimes. Chilean feminists mobilised people to vote against the Pinochet regime. Peruvian women resisted the military dictatorship while simultaneously resisting terrorism, often paying the price at both ends. The women's movement was central in the coalition that overthrew the Marcos regime in the Philippines.

Women's right to bodily integrity has always been most difficult to articulate. The inability of the Awami League to provide unequivocal support to the thirty thousand Bangladeshi women raped by the Pakistani Army during the 1971 war, and the ambivalence of the progressive, pro-liberation Catholic church in several countries on the issue of women's right to abortion, point to the criticality of feminist organising.

In women's experience, liberation, while it may begin with national liberation, must extend to the often inaccessible terrain of women's right to the freedom of person. This right, however, is placed within a complex and intricate web of relationships, both personal and political, private and public, so that articulating the right to the freedom of person often travels back and forth between negotiation and assertion. The space that circumscribes this articulation shifts constantly between family and community, both also extremely dynamic, fluid spaces that merge, dissolve and congeal into new forms.

There are several ways in which the ideologies of family intersect with women's experience. In countries like Nigeria, the widespread prevalence of 'wifeism', or the systematic appointment of wives of high-ranking government officials as leaders of state-sponsored women's organisations, erodes the bases of a more radical feminism and reinforces the prevailing stereotypes of women as appendages of men. Women in Central Europe, Russia and China, in contrast, persist in carving out an autonomous, free space where 'living in truth' is possible, the family offering refuge from official pressures to conform.

The logical step after historicising and documenting women's experiences is to search for ways of feeding these reflections back into communities, and forcing communities and those who work with them to reflect on their experience. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) enables this translation of rhetoric into reality, of theory into practice. *The myth of community*, a text for practitioners of PRA, presents several experiences of PRA in widely varying contexts, each examining a specific intersection of gender with community. Broadly, one could summarise the concerns of the book as wanting to develop a conceptual understanding of community, gender, participation and empowerment; to develop methodologies of participatory development that enable a more meaningful participation of

women; and to explore the avenues of organisational change that would create support structures necessary for the practice of gender-sensitive PRA. The book urges practitioners of participatory development to ensure that their work is informed by an understanding of gender.

These books open up in very different ways the intersection of patriarchy with region, race, class, caste, community, the state and sexual orientation, in the process problematising the homogenisation of women's experience and, more importantly, of feminist praxis.

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KALPANA KANNABIRAN

ABHILASHA KUMARI and SABINA KIDWAI, *Crossing the sacred line: Women's search for political power*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998. vii + 226 pp. Rs. 190 (paperback)

AND

RAKA RAY, *Fields of protest: Women's movement in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000. xiii + 217 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. Rs. 250 (hardback).

The women's movement in India, as elsewhere in the world, has grappled with questions pertaining to *what* constitues women's interests, *who* can legitimately define these interests and significantly, do all women have the *same* interests. Both *Crossing the sacred line* and *Fields of protest* address the dilemmas which these questions seem to present for the women's movement in India. Both works are similar to the extent that they seek to understand why and how certain issues take prominence in the women's movement, and the structural and ideological constraints within which and in response to which these issues get articulated in specific ways.

In *Crossing the sacred line*, Abhilasha Kumari and Sabina Kidwai question explanations for the invisibility of women in the political sphere which ground themselves in a biological determinism prescribing for women 'feminine' interests separate from, and incommensurable with, the male sphere of political activities. By constructing what they call an 'authoritative self-knowledge', through women's own experiences in politics garnered from interviews of women in political parties, Kumari and Kidwai look at the 'hidden barriers' within political parties. Focusing on three 'major' political parties, viz., Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress, and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]), and two regional parties, Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, the study examines how these political parties on diverse ends of the political spectrum view women ideologically, what roles they envisage for women within the party, how much power men in the party are willing to share with the party women, and the extent and urgency with which questions of women's rights are addressed by them

The interviews indicate that, irrespective of their public postures in favour of or against reservation for women in Parliament; their position on the left, right or centre of the political spectrum; or their regional or national character, none of the political parties questioned traditional notions of women's role or status in society. Political participation was not only primarily associated with activity in the public realm, but women were seen as belonging naturally to the apolitical, private realm, so much so that women's efforts to 'cross the sacred line' were seen either as a challenge to some sacrosanct 'tradition' or as an affront to the 'natural' order. Invariably, then, discussions on women's political roles focused not on sorting out the best possible ways of assuring adequate participation by women, but on the fundamental inability of women to be political. The authors correctly point out that whereas debates pertaining to the access of other 'marginalised' groups to political power are grounded in the principles of democratic participation and inclusion, in the case of women, issues of democratic participation almost always become contingent upon their capabilities, education and awareness. Such ideological conservatism on the women's question translates itself into discriminatory structures within party organisations and politics. Almost all women politicians interviewed by the authors pointed out that women were absent or inadequately represented in the organisational structures of parties and found it extremely difficult to get an opportunity to contest elections. When given the chance, women candidates often found themselves contesting 'losing' seats. In conditions of confusion and uncertainty emanating from political alliances and seat adjustments, opportunities for women were further restricted as they were more likely to be dispensed with in the bargaining process. When elected, women politicians claimed to have found it more difficult to reach a position of responsibility (e.g., a ministerial position) commensurate with their political experience and ability.

In *Fields of protest*, Raka Ray takes a more optimistic view suggesting that affiliated women's groups may not always define their priorities and course of action within the dominant paradigms of the party organisation. The manner in which women's activism manifests itself, and women's interests get articulated, she suggests, depends in the ultimate analysis on the nature of the *political field* in which the movement is situated. Comparing women's movements in Calcutta and Bombay, Ray's study starts with some pertinent puzzles, viz., why was it that Calcutta, a city with the reputation of being 'politically tempestuous', was conspicuous by its absence from the publicly acknowledged realm of feminism, whereas Bombay had come to be acknowledged as the epitome of a vibrant Indian women's movement? Why was it that women's issues got articulated in dissimilar ways in the two cities otherwise similar in their history of political participation of women? Why was it that the same women's organisations articulated women's interests and issues differently in the two cities? The answers for the author seem to lie in their different *political fields*, i.e., the 'structural, unequal, and socially constructed environment' within which these organisations were embedded and to which they constantly responded.

The hegemonic political field of Calcutta, emanating from a predominant and monolithic left culture and the concentration of power in the organisational machinery of the Communist Party, meant that the women's movement in the city had to constantly negotiate its existence within and in response to this 'monolithic, impermeable' political environment. The Paschim Banga Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti (PBGMS), the women's front of the CPI(M) and the state branch of the All India Democratic Women's Association, as an arm of the state, was the dominant women's group. Its association with state power was, however, also a source of its weakness as a feminist group, as issues like work, violence and women's choices got defined in a largely de-gendered way. Sachetana, an autonomous group of women academics and development workers, differed from PBGMS in its formulation of issues, but was ideologically constrained, and like the PBGMS subordinate and dependent in a hegemonic political field. The political field in Bombay being more contested and dispersed, with no single political party holding hegemonic sway, women's organisations co-existed with numerous other social actors. In this dispersed and fragmented political field, the Forum Against Oppression of Women, a relatively small autonomous group without any 'mass base', could apply 'its finely honed techniques of persuasive communication' and legitimise 'speaking out about one's own experiences' and 'a new way of thinking about violence against women'. The sister organisation of the PBGMS in Bombay, the Janwadi Mahila Sangathan (JMS), though without the political power the former wielded in Calcutta, and despite the Forum's monopoly of the feminist discourse, had relatively more space to reflect on, refine and rearticulate its analysis of gender issues in feminist terms.

Having grown out of a doctoral dissertation, *Fields of protest* reflects the rigours of methodical field research and complex analysis. *Crossing the sacred line* offers an insight into the debates on women's political participation which have opened up afresh in the wake of the pending Women's Reservation Bill. Research scholars as well as academics well versed in the finer nuances of comparative study will find both these books useful and thought-provoking.

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Chandigarh

MARY E. JOHN and JANAKI NAIR, eds., *A question of silence? The sexual economies of modern India*. New Delhi. Kali for Women, 1998. viii + 412 pp. Notes, index. Rs. 420 (hardback).

The fact that sexuality is an almost uncharted terrain in India is evident from the uneven nature of the volume under review. Comprising several essays by feminist scholars and published by the redoubtable Kali Press, the book is nevertheless an important inaugural enterprise which will hopefully lead to the expansion and development of debates in this crucial area. The introduction by the two editors makes the mistake of structuring itself around the essays in the volume. This, on the one hand, makes it appear as if the sexual histories and genealogies in

India or even the writing on sexuality unfolded in the ways demarcated by the essays, and, on the other, leaves unexamined the central question of why there has been an overwhelming silence on the question of sexuality, especially women's sexualities. This silence is not specific to India but is rather a feature of global patriarchy, and a theoretical investigation into it would have been more useful than the necessarily superficial survey of a proliferation of sites in which sexuality operates.

Of the historical essays, the best one is Kumkum Roy's tracing the textual and political histories of the *Kamasutra*. She shows how it was constructed at its inception and its appropriations and reconstructions at various historical points to suit differing purposes, whether they be of those of 19th century Orientalists or Indian patriarchalists. This is combined with a detailed and perceptive reading of the actual text, demythologising the popular and inflationary perceptions that shroud this foundational text. The two other historical essays disappoint. Samita Sen's essay is an inordinately boring account of how the colonial state in Bengal attempted to regulate non-conformist conseptions of marriage, especially among lower caste groups. It suffers from a defect that mars many essays in this book. It concentrates on well-known facts about the control and regulation of sexuality that we have been offered ad nauseum but actually tells us very little about what this sexuality comprised, what it entailed.

S. Anandhi's essay on similar regulations in early 20th century Tamil Nadu reiterates well-known ways in which Malthusian, nationalist and feminist-nationalist policies perceived and attempted to control women only as reproductive bodies, and lower caste women as inferior and in need of greater control, but tells us very little about how these women actually responded or how these policies intersected with their sexual beings and practices. Instead, she juxtaposes this with Periyar's more progressive politics on women's right to their own sexualities and bodies which she sees as exemplary. However, her appraisal of Periyar is wholly uncritical and does not raise larger questions which problematise Periyar's feminist politics and vision.

Kalpana Ram is aware of these larger problems in Periyar's vision in her paper, which is the best of the anthropological contributions. This is because she pays attention and gives voice to the various women she works with—Christian women in Kanyakumari district, Chennai—and concentrates on how these women perceive their own menstruation and bodily and sexual processes, rather than give us another narrative about discourses of control. Tejaswini Niranjana's essay, however, again concentrates on perceptions of women's sexuality by hegemonic powers instead of on the narratives of *chutney soca* (an Indianised calypso dance) dancers themselves in Trinidad, which is the subject of her work. Instead of focusing on the dance and its sexual nature that is so upsetting to conservatives and what it says about Indian Trinidadians, we get discourses of control and questions based on Niranjana's rather different agenda and focus.

V. Geetha and Prem Chowdhry are the other two anthropological contributors and both their pieces suffer from the same malaise. Geetha starts with a promising investigation into the sexual dynamics and politics of domestic violence and

wife-battering, but then digresses to a very thoughtless set of ramblings on male sexuality and psyche in general, cobbled together from a bizarre set of virtually irreconcilable positions in Western feminism and US black feminism and politics. Instead, a close analysis of these women's narratives and what they tell us about the cyclical and exploitative nature of sexuality's role in violence would have been pioneering. Prem Chowdhry once again concentrates on feudal and patriarchal control of inter- and intra-caste marriages in western UP (a reality that is hardly news to us) instead of showing us the role of sexuality in these couples' defiance of chillingly brutal systems of control and destruction. Her fieldwork would be more fruitful had she spoken to couples who have survived, run away and based their lives on this romantic and sexual assertion.

Of the essays on the media, literature, cinema and so on, Uma Chakravarti's exploration of sexuality in the TV serial *Chanakya* is the best. Focused and subtly attentive to the subliminal Hindutva politics of the serial, it stands in sharp contrast to the two worst essays in the collection, those by Susie Tharu and Ravi Vasudevan. Written in mannered, verbose, unreadable prose, full of needless and pretentious theoretical digressions and written clearly for a Western market, their respective subjects, Saroj Pathak's stories and *Awara*, get drowned in these self-conscious pieces that have very little to tell us about the workings of sexuality in any case. Mary E. John's own ramblings in the book's final essay are written in similar prose which only confounds its own arguments.

In sharp contrast is the clearly written essay by U. Vindhya on the role of female sexuality in revolutionary movements in Andhra Pradesh. She begins with a critique of the sexism in Marxist politics, but again this is hardly news. Instead of giving us the voices of women in the movement that contest this sexism, we are given an account of the progressive feminism of Chalam (Andhra's Periyar). While Vindhya's appraisal of him is somewhat more nuanced than S. Anandhi's, it tells us little about the sexualities of revolutionary women or the role of sexuality in revolutionary politics. The Chalam section is clearly the subject of a different essay altogether.

Finally, the omission of alternative sexualites in the book, not only as a separate essay (the excuse offered is lame) but also as a way of dismantling heterosexualist discourse in practically every essay in the book, is shocking and impoverishing. All in all, this is a dissatisfying volume, but has opened the debate on sexualities in India to what will hopefully be a full and rigorous engagement.

Delhi ASHLEY TELLIS

K. SARADAMONI, *Matriliny transformed: Family, law and ideology in twentieth century Travancore*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 176 pp. Map, notes, references, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 175 (paperback).

What did matriliny offer women, in terms of their daily lives, and how did it all change? Were women aware of the changes, and how did they respond?

Saradamoni looks for insights over a long historical period—1729, when the state of Travancore was formed, to the mid-1920s, when matriliny was altered comprehensively through legislation. This study of matriliny and its decline in the princely state of Travancore is inspired by the author's belief that matriliny supported features which strengthened the social and economic position of women. The study is based on a wide range of written sources, importantly, documents relating to law reform and legal disputes, women's journals, research, biography and fiction, and is supplemented with interviews, painstakingly recorded, with women who experienced the crucial early decades of the 20th century.

Saradamoni attempts to argue that matriliny offered a sense of security, autonomy and perhaps even purpose to women, linked in the last instance to their right of permanent residence in their natal home. It is precisely these positive features of matriliny that have been eroded, thanks to the fostering of patrilineal and patriarchal attitudes and practices through social, political and legal reform. Reform, she points out, was informed by male ideas and initiatives. Though women voiced their opinions, as is evident from their writing in women's journals, they were unable to influence the direction of change. As a result, the transformation turned out to be against their interests.

The transformation of matriliny is traced against the background of changes in land-ownership and tenancy, modern education and employment, expansion of public works, communication and trade, and the institution of modern administrative processes, elaborated in the context of the formation of the state of Travancore and its indirect colonisation. The author uses legal disputes to prise open customs that gained prominence during the colonial period. She questions claims that there could be no property relations between father and children or between *sambandham* (marriage) partners, and that women did not possess the right to manage family property. She also indicates that matriliny was able to foster a distinctly liberal attitude towards the sexuality of women, marking a clear difference with patrilineal societies. Hence, there was nothing out of the ordinary in women remarrying on divorce or on the death of their spouses. Further, the oppressive edge of widowhood was happily absent.

Using legal disputes regarding matrilineal customs during the colonial period, writing in women's journals published in the early decades of the 20th century, and interviews with women, the author adds to a most valuable process of piecing together and recording women's lives during the transformative period. Importantly, many of the ideas and opinions expressed in the early 20th century journals, such as ideas on domesticity, marriage and family, understanding women's 'self interest' in the family, education and employment, continue to hold our attention.

Given the richness of the material that the author has at hand, it is disappointing to note that she is unable to develop her argument. The problem here seems to be her preoccupation with the 'loss' of matriliny and its negative consequences for women. This preoccupation constrains her from discerning the

questions so evident in her data. Hence, the crucial question of how the transformation occurred and the processes involved receives only desultory attention. Several processes initiated by the state were crucial in undermining the material basis of matriliny by fostering negative attitudes towards it. A study such as this could have added to our understanding of how the princely state in association with the colonial power actually engendered a commonsense that was distinctly uneasy with matriliny. To take one instance, the author presents several pictures of differential access to the emerging public space on the basis of caste and gender, alongside some indications of pre-existing local practice, but fails to engage with education and employment, administration, and missionary intervention as processes that altered the existing commonsense. This makes it virtually impossible for her to find answers to her questions.

A similar problem is evident in the author's disappointment that people tended to recall 'only the days when partition of *taravads* [matrilineal joint families] took place, which led to bitterness, dislocation and disharmony' and that they raised the argument that matriliny cramped individual initiative. For to take these factors less than seriously is to miss the very real crisis that matriliny came up against in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This crisis formed the very context of social reform against matrilineal customs involving, most prominently, conventional practices that defined and regulated caste and sexuality. Indeed, social reform centred on changing several matrilineal and caste customs created the conditions for legislative reform. The lack of reference to the role of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and the Nair Service Society in coining a wholly different caste identity for the matrilineal castes of Travancore is clearly a big gap. Bringing them in could have led to an engagement with the multiplicity of caste, class and gender identities, which go to positioning women differently in the context of reform.

Although the author is clearly aware of variations in matriliny by region and social group, several questions are not raised. For instance, were there distinct forms of marriage, with variations according to caste and region? In this study there is reference only to *sambandham*, the standardised form among the Nairs, the most numerous matrilineal caste in Kerala. More importantly, how did the absence of the Nambudiris in southern Travancore affect the land and marriage practices of matrilineal groups there? These gaps need to be underlined precisely because of the topicality of this book, in addressing the issues of family, marriage and relations within a particular form of family at a time when the problems with the modern nuclear family are being foregrounded. Also, by giving us a sense of the conflicts and confusions of women and men trying to make sense of their lives at a time of such rapid and dramatic change, this book could usefully inform contemporary debates.

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PRAVEENA KODOTH

SONIA BATHLA, *Women, democracy and the media: Cultural and political representations in the Indian press*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. 209 pp. Tables, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 195 (paperback).

Over the years, the growing visibility of women in public spheres has resulted in some improvement in the quantity of news regarding them in the media. But little can be said about the quality of this news coverage. Most of the news items revolving around women continue to be passed off as un-newsworthy owing to the glaring dominance of the masculine narrative structure in the media. Sonia Bathla's comprehensive research reveals just how this dominant structure operates to under-represent women in opinion and decision-making circles.

Using various theoretical models, the writer brings into focus the conspicuous marginalisation of women in the Indian media that is in fact governed by democratic principles. The fault, she argues, lies with democracy itself, which is largely guided by patriarchal norms that distinguish between public and private spheres, attributing the latter to the female gender. Hence, women's news is naturally perceived as an oddity amid others, which contributes to the 'constructive' making of a nation. Bathla argues that the situation has not altered despite a notable increase in the number of women journalists in recent years. Anxiety to prove themselves in the male-dominated profession pushes them to imbibe the existing values and focus only on male-dominated areas.

Bathla selects four different years to study the pattern of coverage of women's issues/news. The visibility of the women's movement in the 1980s also brought to public attention various issues regarding women that were so far hidden in the private sphere. Thus, in the 1980s, violence/crime against women became a 'novelty for the media'. Apart from the apparent sensationalism and titillation that go with such news, easy accessibility through police records has made them a regular feature in media today. The writer demonstrates how such news lacks an analysis of the contexts in which the events occur (p. 87) and is not followed up later. One should also add here that most often even this brief coverage of violence or crime is done in a highly irresponsible manner.

Mainstream media, be it print or visual, largely looks at women either as submissive, weak creatures that need care, or as desirable objects available for the male gaze. The various popular identities of a woman (daughter, mother, wife, etc.) are fitted within these perceptions by the masculine media. Since both these negative perceptions are not condoned by feminism, naturally feminism is itself understood as an abnormal movement/feature in society. Through extensive interviews, Bathla exposes some of the popular notions about feminism. I am compelled to mention here a particular news story that appeared in a regional English paper some years ago. The headline screamed 'Feminist thieves'. And when one delved into the story, one realised that it was a set of thieves who had robbed a boutique and made away with women's clothes. This only speaks for the attitude towards and understanding of feminism itself, not

just by the media but also the society. Not a single letter appeared pointing out the mistake.

The chapter on 'Media and feminism: The ennui and the antagonism' starkly exposes this *willing* lack of understanding of feminism by media.

As if in response, the women's movement too has become indifferent to media coverage, as Bathla points out. This could be largely true of well-established women's groups who, as Bathla mentions, do have direct access to politicians, the policy-makers. At least they may have a forum that listens or pretends to listen to them. But what about others, such as extreme left women's groups who, as potential threats to the state and the patriarchal society, are ostracised both by the policy-makers and by the media? Bathla's indication that greater research is needed to know whether social movements with different concerns and backgrounds share the same advantage of having accessibility to politicians in a way answers our question. Bathla makes a crucial statement in pointing out that, whatever be the media's attitude at present, the 'women's movement, at its level, should attach more importance to media in the gender struggle' (p. 172).

As a woman journalist, I feel that many sections of Bathla's argument border on commensensical and sometimes much too obvious markers, for instance, the process of marginalisation of women's news by the media. In the third chapter, where she builds the foundation for her argument that in India the media is highly Brahminical, some of her arguments are banal and almost incorrect. For example, she begins the chapter thus: 'The structure upon which contemporary Indian society rests has its roots in ancient India. Against the masculine democratic foundations embedded in the Western history, this society was based on caste.' Does she mean that the caste system was not masculine?

After an elaborate attempt to state and demonstrate how the media continues to marginalise women's news, Bathla proposes a few remedies for change that are worth considering immediately. One suggestion that particularly calls for attention is the introduction of gender perspectives in media education at undergraduate and university levels. As for her other suggestion—that journalists concerned with gender issues need to invest more time and energy in their reporting so as to generate more public debate—this can perhaps be done only through special features (lucky for them if the story is accepted the way they want it to be), and not daily news coverage, as most often the latter is determined by editorial superiors. Journalists (sub-editors/reporters), in that sense, are not decision-makers but only labourers. 'The welfare of citizens' may be close to their heart, but the word of the 'Editor' is what they would be forced to obey and act upon.

Finally, it is the narrative structure of news that needs to be altered. A greater interaction between journalists, the women's movement, policy-makers and the general readers through public fora like workshops and seminars would set the ball rolling. And Bathla's research provides the necessary pointers for further debate and discussion among these groups.

Bangalore MAITHRI

DAVID OWEN, ed., *Sociology after postmodernism*. London: Sage Publications, 1997. viii + 228 pp. Figures, notes, references. £40.00 (hardback)/£13.95 (paperback).

When was postmodernism, that we now have sociology *after* it? To recoup Raymond Williams's query is not to resurrect a historical quest but to invoke its intent against a dominant ideology. Is postmodernism over? How do we discern its boundaries? What comes after it? Has it posed a challenge to sociology? If so, of what kind? Has it led to any transformation of the discipline?

Crises and challenges are nothing new to sociology. In the 1970s, the radical challenge of Marxism had prompted some commentators to even call for its abolition! But not so long after, the demand for a sociology of Marxism was afoot. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the tables were turned and the postmortem of the debris became the order of the day. Two decades later Owen strikes a different note as he sets out his objective:

> This is not an apocalyptic text. It does not seek to proclaim the death of sociology. Rather it assembles an overview of current transformations in and of sociology by attending to several of its main domains in the light of the 'postmodern' challenge to contemporary sociology (p. 1).

Several questions are implicit in this poser. Does the resilience of sociology indicate a business as usual of 'normal science' approach? Or have reflexivity and constructivism themselves been incorporated within the disciplinary fold? Can postmodernism now be seen in retrospect? Owen circumvents these questions by tracing the modern genealogy of *society* and reflecting on the conditions of postmodernity in sociology. The essays included address not only the central concerns of sociology like class, gender, race and ethnicity, criminology and deviance or science and technology, but also more recently explored fields like emotions, body, sexuality, media and disciplinary history. To keep the selection within manageable limits, a certain complementarity with the journal *Theory, culture and society* in terms of themes has been maintained. Divergent opinions prevail among the contributors in regard to postmodernism. While some consider the postmodern a new social condition (e.g., Waters, Ashenden, Stein), others wonder whether sociology as a modernist enterprise needs to be displaced by postmodern sociology (e.g., Schroeder, South, Watson and Jowers).

In his opening essay, Owen traces how 'modern society' and the modern concept of 'society' were mutually constitutive in Europe. The emergence of the social as an object of enquiry was precipitated in the 18th century as contiguous to modern governance. Enumeration, labelling and classification made the 'population' integral to policy sciences (*polizeiwissenscchaft*) as the object of governance (p. 3). Sociology, then, is a 'modern form of knowledge' which comprises a 'feature of modernity' (p. 12). Not surprisingly, modernity is a 'central problematic for sociological discourse' (p. 12). Classical sociologists like Marx, Durkheim and Weber were principally concerned with ascertaining its character.

Latter-day theorists like Habermas, Giddens and Beck have continued to comment on its nature in terms of 'self-assertion and self-foundation' or the self-fashioning of the subject (p. 13).

Postmodernism carries a temporal tag in the volume. The overviews of the field that it offers are framed by two problematics which Owen explicates as:

1. the relationship of state and society within moral, political and economic discourses of governance; and
2. the relationship between the ideas of the unity and diversity of humanity and the development of the modern concept of history and historical progress, in the context of the quarrel between the ancients and moderns—and in the context of Europe's colonial relationship to the non-European other (p. 2).

In the essays themselves, while the ideas of governance, history and humanity remain salient, the colonial underpinnings of modernity are scarcely heeded. Sociology remains a 'metropolitan' endeavour preoccupied with the modalities of subject formation. But invariably they are individual subjects who are as constitutive as constituted.

Among the sub-fields surveyed, postmodernism has had variable effects. Aspects of the social which were often represented in essentialised ways like race, gender, sex and criminal propensities are relativised by the postmodern intervention. On the other hand, convergent categories like class, law and media have been disaggregated. Certain other areas of enquiry like the perspectives on science and technology, body or affect, have undergone significant shifts. Not all the contributors are sympathetic to postmodernism. South on criminology and Schroeder on science and technology are sceptical about the deconstructive potential of postmodernism.

Connolly's essay on 'Racism and postmodernism' traverses the course that the discourse on race has taken over the last three decades. From essentialised representations of race in which skin colour signified race, to the construction of 'new ethnicities' (p. 65) which framed attitudes towards recent immigrants, to the discrete confines of cultural practices, the discourses on race and ethnicity have shifted gear. Connolly on the other hand utilises Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital' to understand the de-centred racial self, and how minority styles become preferred even among the majority youth.

Kellner's essay on 'Social theory and cultural studies' counterposes the Frankfurt School's position on popular culture to that of British Cultural Studies à la Birmingham! He criticises the reification of the 'popular' as a site of resistance and proposes a multi-perspectival view which would not ignore political economy, would engage in critical textual analysis and would interpret the reception and use of cultural products.

Dean's 'Sociology after society', after historically tracing the notion of 'society' which makes sociology possible, calls for it to serve as *parrhesia* or a form of

truth-telling. In a situation of the fragmentation of the social, social action is increasingly performative in an environment of risk.

The volume as a whole brings to the fore the myriad concerns of sociology after postmodernism. But it leaves one with the impression that the challenge of postmodernism has also been normalised.

Centre for Studies in Social Sciences ANJAN GHOSH
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JOSEPH W. ELDER, EDWARD C. DIMOCK, JR. and AINSLIE T. EMBREE, eds., *India's worlds and US scholars, 1947–1997*. Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1998. 608 pp. Notes, references, index. Rs. 750 (hardback).

The book under review is a useful guide to American-produced and -funded scholarship on India. It has been prepared by a group of US scholars under the guidance of three senior South Asian specialists—Elder, Dimock and Embree—who have been closely involved for a number of years in promoting research by Americans in the region, especially through the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS). The initial aim of the volume, according to the editors, was to 'identify ways in which, during the past fifty years, scholars, by working with data and systems of conceptualization and articulation in India, have been led to reconsider western-based theories, classification schemes [etc.]...' (pp. 13–14), but most of the chapters are more like bibliographic essays, with a focus on American work.

The 108-page introduction by Maureen L.P. Patterson provides an interesting and thorough account of the history of American academic activities in relation to India and the development of funding sources and institutional bases for such research, with a focus on the significant contribution of the AIIS. The troubled relationship between the US and India from the 1970s until recently, which was reflected at the academic level, is alluded to here, but its repercussions are not fully explored, for obvious reasons, this being an official AIIS publication. (As far as I know, a full-fledged critical study of the AIIS has not yet been done, but such a study would certainly throw light on certain dark corners of the history of Indo-American relations and of academic research on India, and even on the nature of bureaucratic functioning in India: the skill of the AIIS's Director-General Pradeep Mehendiratta in pushing research visas and other cumbersome paperwork through the appropriate official channels in Delhi is legendary.) This introduction is the most informative part of the volume, containing information not easily available elsewhere.

Each subsequent chapter focuses on a particular academic field and is written by a specialist in that field. There are twenty-six disciplines and sub-disciplines covered, including the obvious ones of anthropology, religious studies, Sanskrit and music, as well as less well-known ones (with regard to South Asian studies in the US) such as mathematics. Readers of the present journal will be most interested in the sections on anthropology by Susan Wadley, history (pre-colonial) by

David Ludden, history (colonial and post-colonial) by Frank Conlon, sociology (Joseph Elder), women's studies (Geraldine Forbes), and religious studies (modern Hinduism/Jainism) by Lawrence Babb, among others. Each chapter gives a brief account of research on India from independence till the present, highlighting major themes and issues, and includes a bibliography or references given in notes.

Wadley's bibliography for anthropology includes most of the significant American publications, but it is of course far from exhaustive. Reflecting upon how the nature of academic exchange has changed since the 1950s, a good portion of the work cited for the 1990s is by Indian scholars such as Amita Baviskar, included here presumably because they are 'US trained'. The last brief section entitled 'A new paradigm?' significantly refers more to the work of Indian scholars such as Partha Chatterjee and Bina Agarwal than to American work. Here Wadley misses a good opportunity to analyse the 'American gaze', to consider how it differs from the 'indigenous' one, and why American scholars (including some of the 'US-trained' Indians) so often produce work that, for all its theoretical sophistication, seems to have little grip on Indian reality (if one may use the term).

Perhaps because of the nature of the field, Ludden's contribution primarily reviews the work of Indian scholars on pre-colonial history, while Conlon's chapter concentrates more on foreign scholars, and not only Americans. Joe Elder, however, covers almost exclusively the work of American sociologists on India. This unevenness of approach is one reason why the volume has failed to achieve its professed aim, the second being that due to constraints of space there is insufficient analysis and reflection in most of the chapters. The book is nonetheless a useful reference work that should be purchased by university and department libraries, but it is too costly and general to be on any individual's wish list.

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Mumbai

CHRISTIANE BROSIUS and MELISSA BUTCHER, eds., *Image journeys: Audio-visual media and cultural change in India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 338 pp. Plates, notes, references, bibliography, index. Rs. 250 (paperback).

Rarely have I encountered a book more resistant to review than *Image journeys*, and even more seldom have I felt as cramped when writing about my problems about a volume. The essays in the collection are uneven, with their share of disappointments and surprises, and I will name a few of these en route. However, the crux of the difficulty is configured differently and emerges most clearly in Britta Ohm's elegant saga of Doordarshan as the representer of the nation-state. This description of Doordarshan's futile battle with Western cultural demons is introduced with Brecht's pessimism regarding the unidirectionality of broadcast communication, and Nirad Chaudhuri's fatalistic acceptance of India's historical destiny in the cultural periphery of the world. The first moment of the essay

traces the process by which a hegemonic Hindu aesthetic subverts the realist language of the Nehruvian state-run television programming, working through the self-destructive agency of Doordarshan. The second moment describes how globalising television becomes a predator feeding on the Doordarshan satellite experiment, and establishing its own unidirectional hegemony. The description fails to satisfy. Questions arise in areas dealt with scantily: What is the dynamics of the rural viewer's response? 'Why do they not ask us? We can tell them what kind of programming we want...' (p. 85). What kind of rural viewer is this? Surely, this question should be linked to a more detailed understanding of regional television than that offered elsewhere by the author? What are the processes that animate the emergence of the global/regional/local in Indian television? How are we to understand regional networks that assume a transnationalist profile (Asianet)? Or a televised aesthetic that puts India on the global 'beauty' map several times? In the face of these questions, Ohm's essay itself takes on the distanced and flattened aspect of a satellite image that provides a resolution as false as it is unidirectional. It seems to me that the political concepts and frameworks of explanation to address these questions are rudimentary in Western theory, including the (post)Marxist one Ohm draws on, and this is what makes the otherwise competent essay sound surprisingly bookish in the Indian context.

Ronald Inden's study in Indian cinema, marked by signs of scholarly competence and familiarity with the material, attempts to describe the rise of a new sort of icon in the 1990s. Reading through his analysis of *Jeet* and *Hum Aap Ke Hai Kaun*, I am struck by how his iconology leans heavily on a rather superficial analysis of narrative, and very lightly on the analysis of visual representation; e.g., the iconic star is defined more within the narrative sequence and less by the visual representation of the hero or heroine. Because of this bias towards narrative, he misses the structural interplay between the narrative and the image, which is crucial to any iconology of contemporary India. What does the hero *look* like? How is he dressed? What are the force relationships between this image–narrative couple (*icono-graphy*) and different viewers? How does this iconography establish its roots in the socio-cultural terrain? In what way is this iconography *different* from (rather than like, as Inden points out) older Indian iconographies?

I found the last two essays on the marriage video-wallas (Shuddabrata Sengupta) and on the cable operators of Lajpat Nagar (Samina Mishra) exceptionally rewarding despite their being theoretically 'less sophisticated' (which is probably why they have succumbed to an editorial misjudgement that has relegated them to the end!). These journeys of the image are mapped with a care that animates the writing with a warmth lacking hitherto. Perhaps a way to intensify this pleasurable style would be to try and see how these descriptions with their empirical detail are failed by the theories normally used to explain them. The way forward would then be to see what the reasons for these failures are and how to move in order to circumvent them; or better still, to rewrite

the problematic so that the conundrums appear as mirages projected by an unsatisfactory conceptual optic.

Shohini Ghosh's activist-mode essay on the feminist engagement with censorship is an interesting counter-genre establishing a living, engaged voice within the archive, and one can feel the force she battles. The ambiguous convergence between some feminist criticisms of pornography and patriarchal objections is disconcerting, and the censors' conflation of sex and sexism as she delineates them does have crucial implications. However, the reviewer always has the privilege of a wish list: I wish she had extended the scope of her argument to explore the question of marginalisation through censorship of 'other' visualisations of sexuality, an argument made in Western activism and in relation to *Fire*. Since she is one of the few writers in this volume who have dared to refer to caste, I also wish she had explored the cinematic structure of the hegemonic and the marginal in the context of Indian censorship. I wish, yet again, that she had not stepped on the BJP gas pedal so hard and so quickly, because one senses a moral panic that mirrors the one she describes in mainstream society's confrontation with sexual explicitness. What is the structure of the larger social imagination on which the hegemony of the BJP rests, and what is the shape of 'our' complicity in that imagination?

The remaining essays are less than successful, which is both tolerable and part of the reader's responsibility, since we are all bound to write an occasional poorer essay in the political context that I have been referring to. But it *is* exasperating when the lack of success is accompanied by an 'explanatory' language that seems a bit like random cross-talk between Lacan's lecture notes and a garbled long-distance telegram, e.g.

> Channel[V]'s reproduction of a body reflective of a new identificatory order may be an unconscious logic (D.R. Nagaraj, see footnote 6) of the events of economic liberalisation and globalisation, but the process also contains an economic imperative which drive the acceptability of new limit images and the re-investment of the body with new codes of value and order (p. 186).

Secunderabad R. SRIVATSAN

ANANDA MITRA, *India through the western lens: Creating national images in film*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 254 pp. Tables, figures, bibliography, index. Rs. 395 (hardback).

Arguing that movies influence the way the audience thinks about reality, this book examines Hollywood/British films on South Asia(ns) made between the 1930s and the present day, to analyse how these films produce and circulate stereotypical images of the region and its people in the North American public sphere. The central argument of the book is that these films have, over a period of time, produced stereotypical images which 'are retained in the cultural memory and that becomes the dominant way of thinking about the people and their place' (p. 67). The author proposes that, despite significant differences,

such films can be read as constituting a genre in that they share the 'semantic units' that are pieced together to produce the story—although the stories seem different, they are similar. Mitra then goes on to demonstrate how stereotypical images are produced in film. The railways, the bazaar, religious practices and dress, among other things, are mobilised not only to exoticise the other but also to produce an image of the region and the people as backward, uncivilised, etc. The films set up oppositions between East and West; Non-White and White; Evil and Good; and Saved and Saviour, oppositions that are concretised in the narratives and resolved 'to produce the West as victorious' (p. 151). According to the author, filmmakers had to come to terms with four areas of crisis to represent the region and its people: geography, religion, tradition and colonialism/post-colonialism. The areas of crisis 'form the centres of debate and controversy' and filmmakers make choices about 'what makes representations of the people and the place natural and ubiquitous'. Such choices, shows the author, are made repeatedly, 'producing a monolithic image' (p. 178). The author concludes that monolithic images generated in film are a cause for concern since 'there is an articulation, or connection between the images produced by the films and the emergence of the anti-Asian, anti-immigrant feelings in the West' (p. 235).

Coming two decades after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, this book, which for the most part restates Said's argument with considerably less force, is an exercise in futility. By way of analysis, regardless of the invocation of structuralism and film theory, the book has little to offer. Regrettably, a listing of categories and sub-categories is offered as a substitute for insightful analysis. For example, we are told that there are films in which place functions as a motivator and films in which it *does not*—and at the end of this discussion a table is provided (p. 72). The examination of films tends to be repetitive.

The author claims to be responding to rising 'anti-Asian, anti-immigrant feeling in the West'. It is intriguing that 'films on India', which according to the author have always exoticised and demonised the region and dehumanised its people, are cited as one of the important sources of negative images, images that are at least partly responsible for increasing intolerance. Did it take six decades of stereotyping of South Asia for the white, Anglo-Saxon American's tolerance of the non-white immigrants to wear down? In other words, the relationship between these films and the changed socio-political environment in the West is not at all clear. Furthermore, beneath the author's laboured attempt to theorise and critique the production of stereotypical images of South Asia lies a simplistic view of how the ideological battle against such images is to be carried out. Towards the end of the book, Mitra begins to list the achievements of Indians in America—in order to demonstrate that we are not uncivilised after all and have in fact excelled in numerous 'modern' fields (p. 223, for example). He notes with satisfaction that the image of South Asians is changing due to the increasing interaction between the immigrants and Westerners. Curry, for instance, is a hot favourite among Americans—this is offered as proof that the 'image of Indian food being exotic, strange and only spicy' (p. 226) is on its way out. It is

therefore implied that the inaccuracy and unjustness of the stereotypes can be effectively countered by gesturing towards the 'real' world.

Mitra's method of selecting films from different periods and production contexts does not leave room for taking into consideration changes in the genre: its evolution over the years, response to technological changes in film production such as the emergence of colour, cinemascope, etc., political changes like the subcontinent's independence from colonial rule, and the spread of television. It is not clear why silent films were not taken into consideration. For reasons best known to the author, none of the quotations has page references.

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RANJINI OBEYESEKERE, *Sri Lankan theater in a time of terror: Political satire in a permitted space*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 208 pp. Map, plates, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 225 (paperback).

The research for this book grew out of a puzzle: 1980–90 was one of the most violent decades in Sri Lankan history, yet it was also a time when Sinhala theatre activity escalated. Political theatre flourished in spite of strict censorship of all other communication media. The author tries to understand this paradox by going back to Buddhist history—the Theravada Buddhist tradition of scepticism. She sees modern-day political developments as being continuous with this tradition. However, she also admits that a comparison with similar conditions in other parts of the world, in Russian-controlled Lithuania or Nazi Germany, for instance, shows that cultures of satire and irony often co-exist with regimes of terror, thus weakening her central argument. I feel that a discussion of political agency—the fact that jokes deflect individual agency, give anonymity to the speaker and can act as a defence mechanism against oppression, as Freud shows—may have helped us to understand the seemingly paradoxical relationship between satire and oppression. The book however has a very informative account of the key theatre productions in this period.

University of Delhi ROMA CHATTERJI

State legitimacy and social suffering in a modern epidemic: A case study of dengue haemorrhagic fever in Delhi

Renu Addlakha

Public health emergencies like epidemic outbreaks provide a challenge to the legitimacy of the state as the mechanism for the maintenance of public order in modern societies. Official agencies, under such circumstances, are faced with the formidable task of rationalising the state's failure to pre-empt a crisis, that is, to maintain their legitimacy in the face of human suffering. This article explores how the Delhi government responded to an outbreak of dengue fever in 1996, an event for which it was entirely unprepared. Using a multi-sited ethnographic approach, I trace the lineaments of the disease outbreak on the multiple but interconnected registers of the state, the media, the medical community and individual citizens. Crucial to this analysis is the notion of crisis, since the implicit line drawn by the state between public disorder and the concern for public good is demonstrated during crises, in the manner in which they are resolved and the legitimacy and stability of the state maintained.

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> Of the great neglected or rather undiscovered diseases of mankind, perhaps no infection commands so vast a domain as do the dengue[1] viruses.
>
> (Halstead 1980: 4)

I
Risk, crisis and public health management

This article is an analysis of the 1996 outbreak of dengue haemorrhagic fever in Delhi (India). The first dengue case was confirmed in the capital on 13 September 1996. Subsequently, between mid-August and mid-December, over 10,000 persons suspected of suffering from the disease were admitted into the seventeen major public and private hospitals in the city. Over 423 persons were reported to have lost their lives in this epidemic.

Public health emergencies like epidemic outbreaks provide a challenge to the legitimacy of the state as the mechanism for the maintenance of public order in modern societies. Official agencies, under such circumstances, are faced with the formidable task of rationalising the state's failure to pre-empt a crisis, that is, to maintain their legitimacy in the face of human suffering. This article explores how the Delhi government responded to a fatal disease outbreak, an event for which it was entirely unprepared. Using a multi-sited ethnographic approach, I trace the lineaments of the disease outbreak on the multiple but interconnected registers of the state, the media, the medical community and individual citizens. Crucial to this analysis is the notion of crisis, since the implicit line drawn by the state between public disorder and the concern for public good is demonstrated during crises, in the manner in which they are resolved and the legitimacy and stability of the state maintained.

Epidemic outbreaks mirror the functioning of modern political systems. Since the 19th century, public health has become an object of political consciousness, wherein the responsibility of the state for the control of infectious disease outbreaks in the body population is articulated. Health has become an index not only of the economic progress of nations but also of the legitimacy of governments. In his in-depth study of the 1994 plague outbreak in Surat (Gujarat), Ghanshyam Shah also points out that the political system may be delegitimised at such times, since '... the strengths and weaknesses of the state are exposed during the crisis situation' (1997: 32).

[1] Dengue is a Spanish homonym for the Swahili term *ki denga*, which refers to a sudden, cramp-like seizure caused by an evil spirit. The term was first introduced into the English medical literature from the Spanish West Indies in 1826–27 (Halstead 1980)

One of the most important components of the state machinery in the area of infectious disease outbreaks is the law. In fact, the term epidemic is as much a legal as a medical category, since the rule book contains a large number of legal provisions which automatically come into force once the state decides to declare an epidemic. Therefore, the decision to declare an epidemic is more often than not an administrative one, with serious political and commercial implications. That is why the state often hesitates in making such a declaration. This hesitation was witnessed in the case of both the cholera epidemic of 1993 in Calcutta (Ghosh and Coutinho 2000) and the dengue epidemic in Delhi. The present study examines this nexus between the law, medicine and the administration, specifically in the context of the public interest litigation initiated by a judge of the Delhi High Court to rein in the dengue epidemic.[2]

In modern societies, the media assumes importance in such situations in its multiple roles of commentator, communicator, educator and watchdog. In addition to contributing towards constituting the genealogy of public events and forging linkages between the state and the public, news organisations play a pivotal role in creating and distributing specific notions of risk in the public domain[3] (Short 1984; Stallings 1990). These notions have a direct bearing on both state discourse and citizens' welfare. In the present case, the media played a critical role in revitalising the state machinery.

The state articulates its responsibility for public health through a strategic collaboration with the profession of medicine. It cooperates with the latter for purposes of health intelligence, health surveillance and medico-administration. The state is, to a large extent, dependent on medical science for risk assessment. Its health policies and programmes are often shaped by the solutions provided by the medical community. In translating scientific knowledge into concrete action, the state becomes a crucial link between the scientific community and the citizens. However, the translation of medical knowledge into medico-administrative policies also has its own internal dynamics. The state and the medical community may clash during crises, when the state asserts its power in the face of a threat to its legitimacy. For instance, in their analysis of the 1992–93 cholera epidemic

[2] Justice Usha Mehra initiated a *suo motu* litigation against the Delhi administration on 8 October 1996, accusing it of criminal negligence in allowing the dengue outbreak to assume epidemic proportions.

[3] A basic postulate of the field of the sociology of risk is that both risk and safety are not objective conditions, but are inextricably embedded in social structure (Douglas 1966, 1992). Consequently, sociological analysis focuses on the social constructions, distribution and perceptions of risk in different social domains.

in Calcutta, Ghosh and Coutinho (2000) show that though the scientists at the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases definitively identified the disease as caused by the micro-organism *vibrio cholerae*, the state health ministry dithered in designating the outbreak as cholera and declaring an epidemic. The authors point out that the doctors could only suggest that the disease outbreak was taking the form of an epidemic, with the final authority of ratification being vested in the political regime rather than in the scientific community.

As a counterpoint to the responses of the state to epidemic outbreaks, illness narratives present an anthropological exegesis of how communities define and cope with a health crisis episode, how suffering is experienced and reconstituted through memory, and how the normal and pathological are configured with respect to infectious disease outbreaks. Furthermore, epidemic outbreaks may also emerge as the idiom for articulating notions of citizenship, because interwoven in the bureaucratic, judicial, media and medical discourses are the responses of individual sufferers, inhabiting distinctive local moral worlds.

Consequently, the bureaucracy, the medical community, the judiciary, the media and local communities emerge as distinctive and interlacing sites upon which public health emergencies are produced, defined and contained. These actors have different stakes, which shape the negotiations into which they enter in specific health crisis situations. For instance, the media's tendency to sensationalise is often linked to the profit motive of media entrepreneurs, which comes in conflict with the state's desire to underplay the gravity of certain events that threaten its legitimacy. Consequently, it is often observed that while bureaucrats and politicians accuse the press of subversive reporting during disease outbreaks, the latter focuses on the lethargy and callousness of the former (Coutinho and Banerjea 2000; Ghosh and Coutinho 2000).

Looking at a specific disease outbreak from the perspective of different social actors, it appears that a notion of crisis is central to structuring their responses. Consequently, one of the important questions that that I pose in this article is: how is the notion of crisis configured in relation to epidemics and outbreaks of diseases?

Much of public health management is a negotiation between everyday life and such crises. While ordinary morbidity and mortality may not receive much attention, these 'crises' have a productivity that informs public debate on health management in very definitive ways. Since such crises are also mediated by various political interests,

this may result in the development of a 'geography of blame' (Farmer 1992) and the stereotyping of victims. Such occurrences also raise questions as to why a situation or event might be seen as a public health crisis by the community, but not by the state, or vice versa. While in the public health literature, the notion of crises is invariably, and more or less exclusively, bound up with the idea of epidemics, it needs to be remembered that the term 'epidemic' is, in fact, also open to multiple interpretations. An epidemic can refer to a disease affecting a large number of people at the same time. Alternatively, it can also refer to a situation when a disease spreads rapidly through a segment of the population, and this can happen periodically. There is yet another usage of the term epidemic. In the context of the present attempt at polio eradication through the Pulse Polio Immunisation Programme, even the detection of a single case in the catchment area has the potential of being defined as an epidemic.

Correspondingly, the term 'crisis' can be examined from two distinct perspectives. One kind is 'normal' and anticipated and becomes such over a prolonged period of time. This expectedness does not detract from its nature as critical, because even though the state, among other bodies, may be geared to tackle it, it still involves the suspension of the routine functioning of institutions and of daily life. The other kind of crisis is the unexpected one. Due to the sudden nature of such crises, decision-making on the part of the state to control the situation becomes urgent and more fraught with risk to public order, to collective benefit and to its own legitimacy. The routinisation of crisis may be seen in the case of cholera epidemics in India, which have in specific spaces been configured as 'chronic crises' by the state and as 'normal crises' by local communities (Das and Dasgupta 2000; Ghosh and Coutinho 2000). On the other hand, the dengue outbreak was a sudden, unanticipated health crisis. Although sporadic outbreaks have been occurring in different localities of the city, the high morbidity and case fatality rates in the 1996 episode initially paralysed the capital's healthcare system.

This study is divided into three main sections. After an initial cursory description of the principal features of dengue fever, its epidemiology, symptomatology, treatment and prevention with special reference to India, I move on to examine the representational role of the media in constructing the crisis and in functioning as a crucial link between the state, the medical profession and local communities. In the third section, I analyse how the state addressed the challenge to its legitimacy in the face of spiralling morbidity and case fatality rates.

The public interest litigation opens a window on the functioning of the state in public health emergencies, when its self-identity as the guardian of public order and safety is questioned. Interspersed in the state, media and medical discourses are the experiences of dengue-afflicted patients as they struggled to define and cope with specific health crisis episodes. Their illness narratives show the appropriation of a lay referral system and a plural medical culture, on which the imprint of the state, medical and media discourses can be discerned.

II
Methodology

The methodological underpinnings of this study are embedded in a multi-sited ethnographic approach. Delineating the central features of this perspective, George Marcus in his seminal paper points out: 'Ethnography moves from its single-sited location, contextualised by macro-constructions of a larger social order such as the capitalist world system, to multiple sites of observation and participation that criss-cut dichotomies such as the "local" and the "global", the "lifeworld" and the "system"' (Marcus 1995: 95). The underlying assumption of this perspective is that there is no single site of cultural production. As Marcus avers, 'This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activities...' (ibid.: 96). The emergence of this perspective is located within inter-disciplinary spheres of research, for instance, media studies, science and technology studies.[4]

In the process of investigating the Delhi outbreak of dengue fever, the movement towards a multi-sited methodology emerged in response to the empirical situation. I followed the object of study from the printed world of the daily newspapers, to the majestic chambers of the Delhi High Court, and overcrowded emergency wards of public hospitals. The object of study, i.e., an outbreak of a specific disease, could not be bounded within a pre-determined single time–space location. Indeed, mapping the terrain through which the episode could be constituted as an event mandated the need to follow associations, connections and

[4] One of the most frequently cited studies in this genre is Emily Martin's 1994 study of the multiple connotations of immunity in American culture. Martin explored different conceptions of the body's immune system in the mass media, within the scientific community, on the street, in the treatment of AIDS and among alternative practitioners in order to show the circulation of a particular metaphor at different social locations.

putative relationships in different ethnographic locales. The distinct, but overlapping, discourses of dengue in the media, the court-room and the hospital resonated with core themes of state legitimacy and social suffering, testifying yet again to the plurality of processes of cultural production and reproduction in modern societies.

The media discourse on the dengue outbreak in Delhi is primarily based on a review of newspaper reports from August to November 1996. The daily English newspapers, such as *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Indian Express* and *The Pioneer*, along with a few Hindi dailies, were scrutinised. The hearings on the public interest litigation in the Delhi High Court were followed up from the beginning of October 1996 to the end of January 1997. In addition to interviewing some of the *amicus curiae* assisting the Court, and counsels representing the various wings of the Delhi and central governments, the court-room provided an opportunity to interact with a whole range of government health officials, medical researchers, NGO representatives and journalists involved with the issue in different ways. Simultaneously, in order to understand the management of the dengue outbreak by the healthcare system in the city and to get some idea of the illness experiences of patients and their families, a short stint of fieldwork was also conducted in the emergency wards of four public hospitals.

III
Dengue fever: An overview

Dengue infection is a vector-borne disease transmitted to human beings through the two species of mosquitoes, namely, *aedes aegypti* and *aedes albopictus*[5]. *Aedes aegypti* breeds in urban domestic breeding environments, such as household water containers and human-made receptacles[6] in which water collects. It flies during the day, which is the peak period of transmission. Although distributed worldwide, dengue is most prevalent in Southeast Asia and in the Western Pacific region, where a series of epidemics have occurred since the 1970s. Dengue epidemics usually occur during the rainy season. In several endemic regions, outbreaks correlate with the monsoon season.

[5] The feeding habits of the two species are such that *aedes aegypti* bites indoors, while *aedes albopictus* bites outdoors. The latter is found in forest fringes, settled agricultural areas and plantations around houses. *aedes aegypti* is more commonly found in the crowded and poor centres of cities.

[6] Water coolers, tyres and flower pots were most often cited in the media reports as prime sites for the breeding of the *aedes aegypti* mosquito.

Children are a high risk group, although older persons are also susceptible, especially in endemic areas. No significant differences in sex of cases has been observed. In some countries, however, a slightly higher number of females with dengue infection has resulted in a higher case fatality rate in women in comparison to men (Jetansen et al. 1962). Occupational status has also been found to exert an influence on disease incidence in certain areas. For instance, in areas with a high density of *Aedes albopictus*, those engaged in outdoor occupations, such as policemen and gardeners, have been found to be more susceptible. In areas where *Aedes aegypti* is more prevalent, the disease has been found to afflict mainly children and adult females, who stay indoors during the daytime.

After an incubation period of three to ten days from the time of the mosquito bite, onset is manifested in a sudden rise in body temperature. The fever is accompanied by a range of undifferentiated clinical symptoms, such as acute headache, backache, abdominal pain, stiffness in muscles and joints, general malaise and measles-like rashes. A patient may also experience chilliness, retro-orbital pain and photophobia. As the infection progresses, the platelet count in the blood also falls drastically. Although benign and incapacitating in its classical form, when manifested as dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF) or dengue shock syndrome (DSS), the disease can be fatal. Clinical diagnostic criteria for identifying dengue fever, dengue haemorrhagic fever with or without shock, have been proposed by the World Health Organisation (WHO 1975), and in 90 per cent of cases dengue infection has, subsequently, been confirmed by serological diagnosis in the laboratory.

The management of dengue fever is mainly symptomatic and supportive. Bed-rest during the febrile phase and use of antipyretics to maintain body temperature are the main modalities of treatment. Fluid replacement may also be necessary. In case of haemorrhage or shock, patients may require transfusion with fresh whole blood. In addition to case identification and supportive treatment, primary preventive measures, such as vector control measures and public education about the breeding habits of the carrier mosquitoes, are the only control strategies.

Dengue in India

Dengue infection has been making intermittent appearances in India for the past four decades. The first outbreak of dengue was reported from Vellore (Andhra Pradesh) in 1956. Since then, year after year, its persistence in the country has been observed. All four serotypes have been isolated from human sera during outbreaks in different parts of the

country. The first *aedes*-borne haemorrhagic fever outbreak occurred in Calcutta in 1964.

Outbreaks of dengue fever have been occurring sporadically in Delhi. Episodes of dengue outbreak were reported in 1982 and 1988 from several areas in south Delhi. They occurred in the post-monsoon months from August to November. Entomological surveys conducted by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) have shown an increase in density of *aedes aegypti* in different localities of the capital since 1990 (Yadava and Narsimhan 1996). Until the 1996 episode the outbreaks were, however, of simple dengue fever, since there was no haemorrhagic manifestation.

IV

Constituting the crisis: The representational role of the media

The media forms one locus through which public events come to be configured in the contemporary world. Arthur Kleinman and others (1996) have pointed out in another context how the mediatisation of events frames policies and intervention. During public health crises, newspapers function as an essential communication link between the state, the medical community and the general population. An overview of the news reports during the dengue outbreak shows that the print media played a vital role, acting both as a source of information for the public and as a sentinel of government action. The press tried to assess the outbreaks from the perspective of different actors, such as the state agencies, the medical profession and the affected communities. In the process, it became a platform on which negotiations between the agents of control and the communities took place.

The existence of the dengue epidemic was brought into public consciousness through reports appearing in the local dailies from the first week of August 1996. The outbreak was initially shrouded in mystery, as the virus could not be identified. It was generally referred to as a fever, whose symptoms were similar to those of malaria. The first cases of this 'mystery fever' were reported from village Ladwa in Hissar district of Haryana state, bordering Delhi. The medical infrastructure in this area was not equipped to identify the disease etiology. As the death toll mounted to double figures, media reports highlighted the helplessness of the authorities in dealing with the crisis.

Within a span of about a week, deaths preceded by similar symptoms were reported from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in

the capital[7]. The fact that some doctors from AIIMS and persons from the premier Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, were among the affected generated a lot of publicity. Consequently, in the face of the rising death toll and the spread of the disease to all parts of the city, updated every day in the papers, the medical community started advocating control and preventive measures to rein in the outbreak. Thereafter, comments of expert risk definers began to dominate news reportage. The reports relied heavily on the articulations of medical experts on the disease. The newspapers devoted a fair amount of space to describing the classification of dengue fever into dengue haemorrhagic fever and dengue shock syndrome and providing detailed information on symptoms, management and prevention of the disease. Captions such as 'All you want to know about dengue' and 'Do's and don'ts' dotted the news reports. As the incidence of the disease increased, the reportage also broadened, focusing on such issues as the plight of patients in the healthcare system, the limited medical facilities in public hospitals to manage the outbreak and the deplorable sanitary conditions in the city. Thus, the media began to function simultaneously as information provider and commentator.

For over six weeks after the first case was reported, doctors were reported to be unable to identify the disease without the confirmatory serological tests from the laboratory. The process of microbiological verification entailed a waiting period of more than a month. Nonetheless, the medical fraternity decided that it was important to name the disease and take action rather than wait for the confirmatory tests. Based on the symptoms that were presented in infected patients, doctors seemed to arrive at a consensus that the fever was caused by the dengue virus with the *aedes aegypti* mosquito being the carrier. For instance, the consultant-in-charge at AIIMS casualty, Dr. Pravin Aggarwal, was quoted in a newspaper report as having said that although it was difficult to name the disease without a viral serology test, the symptoms were similar to those of dengue haemorrhagic disorder. Accordingly, the headlines in the newspapers replaced 'Mystery fever' and 'Viral fever' with 'Suspected dengue fever'. The 13 September issue of a prominent newspaper stated: '6 more die of suspected dengue fever'. Most English newspapers used the word 'suspected' with reference to dengue in the initial stages, till about 20 September 1996 by which time positive serological tests were made public. This verdict was accepted by the medical community and the civic authorities without contestation.

[7] AIIMS is an autonomous treatment and research institution under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of India.

This unquestioning acceptance was in some ways unusual, as doctors, and especially administrative authorities, seldom 'risk' naming a disease without first confirming the identity of the virus or bacteria, as the case may be. For instance, in the cholera outbreak in Birbhum district, West Bengal, in July 1990 (Ghosh and Coutinho 2000), the state government insisted on referring to the outbreak as enteritis, since it was not possible to detect the *vibrio cholerae* strains without proper laboratory facilities, notwithstanding the death toll reaching 90 and 2,500 people being affected by the disease. The government's reluctance to name the disease led to a lot of debate, with some doctors calling it cholera and others calling it enteritis. In the case of the dengue outbreak, the outright recognition of the disease in fact produced opposite results. As the panic spread, there was a tendency to classify all types of fever as dengue.

In addition to functioning as a link between various organisations and the public, the media also played an important role in creating links between the different civic agencies. Newspaper reports were used as evidence in the court-room from the outset of the public interest litigation. Justice Usha Mehra, who initiated the *suo motu* litigation against the civic agencies, cited reports appearing in *The Times of India* and *The Indian Express* documenting the spread of the disease and the spiralling case fatality rates. Subsequently, newspaper reporters conducted intensive surveys of the areas in Delhi where water had stagnated, and published detailed reports on the situation in hospitals and blood banks. This reportage, in turn, influenced decisions in the court-room. For instance, when the issue of overcrowding in the public hospitals came up for discussion, one of the *amicus curiae* produced a photograph appearing in an English daily dated 17 October 1996 showing three men lying on a single bed in the government-run Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain Hospital. This piece of visual reportage was accepted by the Division Bench as evidence of the lack of proper facilities in the hospitals. Consequently, the judges ordered the Delhi government health department to take immediate action to remedy the situation.

Another major issue taken up by the court as evidence based on the press reports was the inadequate fumigation undertaken by the Delhi government to decimate the *aedes aegypti* mosquito in various areas of the capital. The reports constantly referred to the insufficient number of trucks used for fumigation in a large city like Delhi, and refuted the claims of the Municipal Corporation that certain areas, named by it, were actually fogged. Again, on the basis of these media reports, the court intervened and ordered the Corporation to provide detailed reports on its fogging operations, area-wise.

In addition to linking up various organisations and experts, the media played an advocacy role in airing the grievances of the public. Since summaries of the court judgements were regularly published in the daily papers, a platform was created where citizens received a hearing and prompt action was initiated. For example, the report of the order passed to remove waterlogging in residential areas prompted local residents to write directly to the High Court demanding prompt action from the government agencies. The experiences of dengue patients and their families in the public healthcare system, complaints of residents on waterlogging in their areas, and the inaction of the local administration were extensively covered in the newspapers.

The role of the media in health crises, their definition and management also has a certain politics to it (Das and Dasgupta 2000; Ghosh and Coutinho 2000). The media has its own agenda and stakes in pursuing the matter. It acts as a conduit through which information enters the public sphere, and also as a sentinel monitoring the performance of the administration and attempting to ensure accountability and transparency on the part of the government. The way the media monitors the steps taken by the government is shaped by its own political affiliations. Epidemic outbreaks may give rise to sensational reporting. Thus, media coverage of outbreaks goes through a process of selection and distribution of news items conducted under the shadow of its own vested interests. For example, one of the journalists covering the dengue case hearings informed us in no uncertain terms:

> The elite are concerned about this disease. The other outbreak, gastroenteritis, which usually breaks out in the slums every year, does not get so much attention. The people who run my newspaper are also anxious about this disease. Top-level managers in newspapers play an important role in deciding which issues should be represented, when and how.

The concern of the 'elite' with this outbreak was probably linked to the portrayal of dengue as a disease of the urban middle and upper classes, primarily attributable to the breeding habits of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito in domestic water collections. In the newspaper reports, both the medical community and the state considered the urban middle classes responsible for contributing to the spread of dengue. Even the Prime Minister, after visiting dengue patients in the central government hospitals, was reported to have said, 'They are not from the slums and the dengue mosquito breeds indoors where the civic authorities could not reach' (*The Times of India*, 22 October 1996). Later he was reported

to have added: 'So the people should have been the ones to take care of it. The government cannot go inside houses to do the job' (ibid.).

Interestingly, during the middle of October when most English dailies had the dengue news on the front page due to its epidemic proportions, most of the Hindi newspapers did not present it as a front page item. This could also be attributed to the anxiety of the urban upper and middle classes, who are the main producers and consumers of the English press.

Collective crises like epidemic outbreaks are often regarded as the failure of the state to assess health risks to the body population and to take appropriate and timely action. For the media such situations become occasions for evaluating the performance of the government, including the healthcare system. Through the mediatisation of such events, the government's strategies to control the situation are brought under scrutiny.

The reporting on the three different agencies in the print media, namely the state, the medical system and legal practice, illustrates two styles of reporting. In the case of the state and medical practice, the reporting was hawkish and tried to 'expose' the ways in which the government agencies and politicians function. Thus, many papers wrote editorials criticising the tardy steps taken by the government. An editorial in *The Times of India*, entitled 'Perennial pestilence', for instance, categorically averred:

> Judging from the ridiculous responses from various urban civic administrations to yet another predictable outbreak of epidemics, it is apparent that they are incapable of even belated wisdom. As the dengue fever mounts in the capital, the state government has devised a novel scheme to combat the disease: various ministers will sleep in affected areas to reassure people. ... [w]hen what is required is a proactive response (*The Times of India*, 14 October 1996).

The analysis of the media reports on the dengue outbreak reveals that the largest amount of criticism was levelled against the government agencies. In the case of the judiciary, however, the reporting assumed a more restrained role. The judiciary was presented in a highly positive manner in the print media. Some newspaper captions on the work of the court were: 'Commendable work'; 'Silence! the court is in session' (*'Khamosh! adalat jari hai'*); 'Court monitors'; 'Court questions'; 'High Court tells city government'; 'High Court asks government to buck up'. The total absence of criticism of the judiciary's handling of the situation was a consistent feature of the reporting.

This alliance between the media and the judiciary can be attributed to a number of factors. The press had easy access to the court orders, the

reporters being the only persons who got them on time. The court, in its turn, used the media as its mouthpiece to communicate with the public. As already mentioned, many newspaper reports were accepted as evidence in the legal proceedings. In the case of reporting on court proceedings, the reporters remained content to accept the releases of orders and to record the proceedings. They did not scout around for a story, as they did with medical practice and the bureaucracy, fiercely pursuing their watchdog functions vis-à-vis the government and the hospitals. According to a *Times of India* reporter interviewed at the Delhi High Court, this non-critical stance towards the judiciary can be understood by the fact that the newspapers could not challenge the legal proceedings or the verdict of the court, as that would amount to 'contempt of court'.

Consequently, the newspapers portrayed the judiciary as the only organ of the state which could maintain order and bring succour. Its role as arbitrator was enhanced by its imputed capacity to be fair. As Warren Breed (1964) puts it, referring to newspapers, the media seek to maintain socio-cultural consensus, not only by dramatising proper behaviours, but also by omitting items which might jeopardise the legitimacy of the media. Although the media were trenchantly critical of the local administration and medical practice in the dengue outbreak, the courts were treated with greater reserve. This trend in reporting emphasises media's functionalist role in society. As Breed writes in this connection: 'Justice is an undoubted value, particularly in times when courts are deciding between life and death and also on private business and public welfare. Judges are treated with respect by the media, even at times after serious criticism' (1964: 195).

Evaluating the role of the media, doctors working in the Delhi Municipal Council repeatedly drew our attention to its negative role in creating undue panic, and increasing the strain on an already overburdened public healthcare system. For instance, it was pointed out that less severe forms of dengue can be managed at home, since the available modalities of treatment are symptomatic and supportive. In the Delhi epidemic, however, even persons suspected of suffering from conditions resembling dengue were referred to the public hospitals. This mass hospitalisation was attributed to the media's portrayal of dengue as a potentially fatal disease. Dr. Harsh Vardhan, the Delhi Health Minister, lamented the tendency to classify all types of fever as dengue. He was reported to have said: 'In the reports of people dying of dengue in north-east Delhi, all deaths [due to any sort of fever] are being labelled dengue, causing panic' (*The Indian Express*, 25 September 1996).

After the initiation of the public interest litigation by Justice Mehra in October 1996, the court-room became an important ethnographic site

for examining the dialectic between the law, the bureaucracy, medicine and the media in the context of a public health crisis. This is the theme of the next section of this article.

V
The law and crisis management

The court played a major role in activating the city administration to treat the situation as a public health emergency. Initially, the attention of both the media and the judiciary was on the management of the sick in the public hospitals. Only after a declining trend in case fatality and hospital admission rates was observed, 'facilitated by the onset of cold weather', did the focus shift from issues of care and control to surveillance and prevention.

Being not just an actor but an action system, the state both attracts and absorbs risks from all sections of society (Das 1995a). Official agencies, under such circumstances, are faced with the formidable task of explaining the state's failure to pre-empt a crisis, i.e., to maintain their legitimacy in the face of human suffering. Scapegoating and bureaucratic buck-passing emerge as typical strategies for self-redemption. This may involve the token transfer or demotion of an erring official (ibid.) and/or the deflection of blame back to the source of accusation (Farmer 1992; Ryan 1971). Implicit in the state's response to an outbreak of dengue haemorrhagic fever in Delhi were specific constructions of the characteristics of the populace at large as both victims and perpetrators of the infection.

The dengue epidemic had caught the state machinery absolutely unprepared to tackle the crisis. The investigative stance of the media and the court forced the administration to go on the defensive against allegations that the situation was not under control. In addition to the standard bureaucratic technique of departmental buck-passing and scapegoating, features of the natural history of dengue were used to constitute a profile of the city's population as both contributing to the spread of the infection and obstructing its control. In the face of massive human suffering, state agencies built up a distinctive configuration of responsibility and blame to vindicate their position. Scientific knowledge, bureaucratic rationality, political expediency and specific constructions of the general population as both victims and perpetrators were strategically marshalled in state rhetoric. Blaming the victim discourses are not an uncommon trope used by the powerful (Douglas 1992; Farmer 1992; Ryan 1971). In the case of outbreaks of infectious diseases, communities

and the media try to assign blame to the state. The latter, in turn, tries to deflect blame back to the source of accusation, and also to dislocate the focus of blame from one set of issues to another.

The state's rhetoric of self-exoneration in the present case was played out in a complex grid of shifting alliances and cleavages between its various organs. At one level, there was the centre–state dialectic between the central government of the Union of India, and the Delhi state government. This was articulated through a range of enunciative modalities encompassing politicians, bureaucrats and medical personnel in the employment of the state. The judiciary was also a crucial actor in this scenario.

In her judgement of 8 October 1996, Justice Mehra painted a grim picture of the health status of the capital's body population, among which dengue and cerebral malaria were singled out as problems of immediate concern. Her judgement she stated:

> The rising death toll of the innocent people by the epidemic of Dengue Fever and cerebral malaria[8] is a cause of great concern, not only to the public, but to all functionaries, be that of Legislature, Administration and of Judiciary. I have been seeing newspaper reports regarding deaths due to dengue haemorrhagic fever, cerebral malaria, hepatitis, malaria and typhoid. Spread of such viral fever and diseases if not detected in time can be fatal (Delhi High Court Order, 8 October 1996).

Commenting on the total collapse of civic amenities and the inadequacy of medical facilities to rein in the epidemic, the judgement goes on to aver:

> The conscience of this court is alarmed at the way the death toll is rising and on the slackness and indifferent attitude of the authorities concerned. This court cannot shut its eyes to what is happening to the society and the attitude adopted by the authorities. It is in this background, and with great pain seeing the suffering of the people at large that this Court intends to issue notice to the following[9] to show cause

[8] The conflation of dengue and cerebral malaria in the judgement is based on the co-occurrence of these two mosquito-borne infections in the capital and in neighbouring states. In addition to being vector-borne, the similarity in their clinical manifestation and outcome led to speculations in some quarters that the current epidemic was not dengue at all, but a mislabelled outbreak of cerebral malaria.

[9] The functionaries of the Delhi government to whom the show cause notice was served were the Head of the Anti-Malaria Cell, the Chief Medical Health Officer, the Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the Administrator of the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), in addition to the Lieutenant-Governor and Health Minister.

as to what action they have taken to prevent, control and cure the said epidemic in discharge of their statutory duties and if no sufficient (*sic*) action has been taken then why action should not be taken against them for criminal negligence of duty resulting in deaths of hundreds of innocent citizens (ibid.).

Although Justice Mehra was acting in the public interest in attempting to activate a sluggish administration to respond to the plight of a hapless population, the meaning and implications of her intervention can better be understood in the light of the emergence of the judiciary as a significant actor in the Indian political, economic and social scenario. Regarding the factors responsible for the rise of 'judicial activism' in the 1990s, the public consensus, as articulated in the media, seems to be that it is linked to the declining standards in the country's public life. The courts are looked upon as the last forum of redressal for aggrieved citizens. A number of landmark judgements bringing top politicians, bureaucrats and corporate officials to book have generated a tremendous faith in the judiciary. The appreciative manner in which the judiciary was presented in the print media has already been discussed in the preceding section.

Notwithstanding this judicial solicitude for the sufferings of the people, the court did not punish anybody. As in the case of the Bhopal Industrial Disaster (Das 1995b), the government agencies were held responsible for the dengue crisis, but not pronounced guilty. Even though Justice Mehra had identified key officials of the Delhi government as responsible for dereliction of duty in her judgement, no one was punished.

The Division Bench hearing the dengue case repeatedly averred that the purpose of the court intervention was not to pin blame. On several occasions during the course of the sessions, when the government agencies were literally on the mat, the Bench reiterated the need for concrete suggestions and constructive action instead of mere criticism. The Chief Justice categorically stated, 'We only want to serve as a catalyst. We are not on a witch hunt'.

Operating within the framework of the status quo, the primary task that the court set itself was to function as an arbitrator, its explicit purpose being to bring the disease under control at the earliest by facilitating the coordinated functioning of the various government departments. Certain key components for control and prevention were identified from the outset, setting the parameters for the judicial response. Providing an adequate

number of beds, medical personnel and equipment in the public hospitals came to constitute the court's strategy for medical management of the situation. The emphasis was on the immediate need to bring down the case fatality load and to make symptomatic treatment available to those already affected. The measures identified on the preventive front consisted of stepping up sanitation and fumigation operations in the city to destroy the *aedes aegypti* mosquito. Thus, despite the heart-rending tone of the initial order, judicial action was more in the nature of overcoming bureaucratic neglect and indifference than of transforming institutional structures.

Public health crises not only pose a danger to the health of the body population but also threaten the state's cherished self-identity as a welfare state. In the analysis of the state's response to public health emergencies, we can delineate a certain pattern whereby the crisis is recognised, defined and managed. Recognition of the situation as a crisis is rarely the first step. On the contrary, the initial reaction to the event is to normalise it. In the case of the present outbreak, although the verdict of the medical community on the existence of the disease dengue was not contested, the Delhi government refused to acknowledge the epidemic proportions of the outbreak.

In fact, one of the first issues that came up for discussion in the court was whether the current dengue outbreak warranted the formal declaration of an epidemic. The routine use of this term to describe the situation by medical experts, the media, as also the judiciary necessitated a clarification. The idea of an epidemic invokes legal measures as a corollary. The process through which the knowledge regarding the degree of threat entailed by a disease outbreak percolates from the scientific to the public space is to a large extent shaped by the position taken by the state vis-à-vis the disease, which is, in turn, critically dependent on the legal provisions it has in place for dealing with such contingencies. One immediate outcome of such a declaration by the Delhi government would have been the enforcement of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. This would have resulted in the compulsory isolation of suspected cases and the screening of travellers. In addition to setting off a panic reaction among the people, such a move would have adversely affected tourism and trade in the international sphere. Memories of the 1994 plague outbreak in the country were still too fresh in the minds of the authorities to hazard such a move.

There are other reasons, too, for the caution exercised by the state in designating a disease outbreak as an epidemic. In addition to tarnishing

the country's image in the international sphere, it immediately focuses attention on loopholes in state health policies, especially in connection with sanitation. In multi-party political systems, political exigency exerts a determinative role in decision-making. Perceiving a crisis in the health system, opposition parties blame the government, which, in turn, retaliates by withholding information. In the present case, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was the ruling party in the Delhi government, a coalition of thirteen political parties was ruling at the centre, with the BJP as the main opposition party. Consequently, notwithstanding the advice of the central government, political considerations did not allow the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in Delhi to make such a move, irrespective of the medical definition of the situation. The Delhi government thus fought shy of making a formal declaration of an epidemic, with its spokesman, the Health Minister, using medical information to support the government's position. So, even as the official number of patients suffering from the disease rose to 3,300, he continued to maintain: 'I would not call it an epidemic, although the efforts we are making are of epidemic proportions' (*The Hindustan Times*, 16 October 1996).

He went on to explain that an epidemic is declared in an area on the basis of the percentage of population affected. In Delhi, with an estimated population of over 13 million, the reported number of a few thousand cases was too small a percentage to term the disease outbreak as an epidemic (ibid.). However, the deployment of the Army, the Central Police Reserve Force and Railways in the fumigation operations shows that the Delhi government was unable to manage the situation on its own.

According to Dr. Pradeep Seth, Professor of Microbiology at AIIMS, 'It is an epidemic' (*The Times of India*, 11 October 1996). He pointed out that dengue epidemics had been occurring in Delhi in the past–in 1953, 1969, 1983, 1989, 1992 and 1994, with high fatalities. In 1989 about 200 people had lost their lives. The death toll in the current outbreak being around 6 per cent of the total number of cases warranted that the situation be defined as an epidemic (for which the case fatality rate could be anywhere between 1 and 20 per cent).

Similar views were also expressed by the Director of the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD),[10] who had been appointed by the court to serve as an adviser on the case. He claimed to have sent a

[10] The NICD, like AIIMS, is a central government institution. It is responsible for national disease surveillance.

circular as far back as 1995 to the health ministers of all states warning of the impending outbreak and suggesting guidelines for prevention and control (*The Indian Express*, 26 October 1996). According to him, 'Dengue has come to stay. We have to accept that' (*The Pioneer*, 14 October 1996).

The medical evidence notwithstanding, the Delhi government sources gave still other reasons for not declaring the situation an epidemic. They claimed that not all the reported cases and deaths were those of Delhi residents, averring that most dengue-afflicted patients were pouring into Delhi from the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana in search of better medical treatment. Thus, the rising number of fatalities and hospital admissions was not a true reflection of the situation. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) even informed a high-level committee that a sample analysis of dengue cases in the capital had shown that 16.5 per cent of the total patients were from outside Delhi, and that 13 per cent of persons who had succumbed to the disease had come to Delhi for treatment (*The Indian Express*, 19 October 1996).

This argument was also advanced by the Delhi Chief Minister in November 1996, when the outbreak was on the decline. Quoting case fatality figures, he noted that out of 334 reported dengue deaths, only 173 (51.8 per cent) were from Delhi. He pointed out that either the residential addresses given were outside Delhi, or false addresses had been supplied by patients showing themselves to be Delhites[11] (*The Times of India*, 2 November 1996).

These were the core arguments of the counsels representing various agencies of the Delhi government on the basis of which the magnitude of the problem and its treatment as a public health emergency were questioned. They categorically informed the court that bringing the Epidemic Diseases Act into operation would not serve any useful purpose, since certain sections of the MCD and NDMC Acts[12] provide for taking the same actions as the authorities would have taken had the Epidemic Diseases Act been invoked.

[11] The overwhelming concentration of healthcare services in urban areas is responsible for this centrifugal movement of patients to metropolitan cities like Delhi, especially during times of crisis.

[12] The reference is to a range of provisions for the prevention of dangerous diseases under both the Delhi Municipal Corporation (MCD) Act, 1957, and the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) Act, 1994. Both Acts have similar provisions to this end, such as the obligation on the part of the public to give information on the occurrence of dangerous diseases, segregation of patients, and disinfection by the local bodies. Both Acts also require the state to undertake sanitation and fumigation work, and to prosecute persons not conforming to state directives in the curtailment of the spread of notifiable diseases.

The controversy regarding the formal notification of an epidemic brought to the surface the latent and not so latent tensions between the different social agencies involved in the management of the outbreak. At the political level, the conflict was framed between two organs of the state, the executive and the judiciary, in the context of the prevailing atmosphere of judicial activism. At another level. the tussle between professionals with a monopoly over technical expertise, and politicians and bureaucrats with vested authority and control over material resources for action, was also discernible. These multiple conflicts were reflected in the apportioning of responsibility and blame, not only between different branches of the government machinery, but also between the competing claims of medical expertise and bureaucratic rationality.

Under the Indian Constitution, health is mainly a state subject. However, the occurrence of a disease outbreak of epidemic proportions in the national capital meant that the union government was forced to play an active role. One of the first submissions made in court by the counsel representing the Indian Union was that the Delhi government had been advised to declare the situation as an epidemic. The fact that the NICD Director claimed to have warned the latter of the impending threat further exonerated the Union from any blame. However, when confronted with the accusation by the counsels representing the Delhi government that even the central government had ignored advance warnings issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) weeks before the outbreak began, the lawyers representing the central government resorted to delaying tactics. When asked by the Bench to make available correspondence between the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the WHO over the past few years, they not only bargained to reduce the duration of time for which it was sought, but also the nature of its presentation. Instead of the entire set of documents, only a selection of some of the most recent correspondence was made available to the Bench, and that too after several reminders. This issue became a central focus of court discussions, not only because of the unimpeachable stature of WHO but also because of the court's desire to ensure that a contingency plan was available, if the epidemic suddenly showed an upward swing or threatened to recur in the near future.

The judges had to wrangle with a gamut of bureaucratic tangles at every stage. Bureaucratic obstructionism supervened in the form of red-tapism, buck-passing and abdication of responsibility. The following excerpts from a discussion, between one of the judges hearing the case and the Municipal Health Officer regarding the fumigation and sanitation

operations, highlights some of the difficulties faced by the court in dealing with these obstacles, which it did not legally wish to skirt.

> Judge: What can be the motive of residents for saying that fogging has not been done?
> Health Officer: To get fogging done repeatedly.
> Chief Justice: Maybe there are management problems; maybe the staff is too lax; maybe they don't have enough instruments. What can be the motivation for denial? You should hold a meeting with your staff.

One of the *amicus curiae* added that the fogging team just fumigated in one street and went away leaving the other areas in the residential colony untouched. This was vehemently contested by the Health Officer. He asserted:

> The vehicles move at five to ten kilometres per hour. They don't rush. There is enough insecticide. Ten people go along with each team to do hand fumigation. People in shops and houses don't open their doors and windows. And it is inside shops and houses that mosquitoes are breeding.

Another issue, which challenged the Delhi government's avowed commitment to public health and well-being, was the relative safety of insecticides like malathion and pyrethrum being used by the civic agencies in fumigation. The matter was raised in the court on the basis of newspaper reports giving instances of several persons having suffered asthmatic attacks after inhaling the fumes during the fogging operations. The NICD Director, when asked to give his expert opinion in this connection, informed the Bench: 'All insecticides have side-effects. But in this situation, where we are concerned with over-all gain for the majority, few people have allergic reactions.'

A crucial issue, which was not followed up by any of the actors in the court-room, was why the use of malathion had been stopped in the first place. The matter had been dealt with in an earlier media report, which was not cited in the court-room. Referring to the dilapidated state of fourteen fogging machines, the reporter concluded:

> This is not surprising as fogging has been banned in the city for the past three years because the chemical used, malathion or pyrethrum, is known to have harmful side effects, especially on pregnant women.

It also affects the lungs and causes a burning sensation in the eyes (*The Indian Express*, 26 September 1996).

One issue, however, upon which all the representatives of the state machinery were more or less in total agreement, was their conception of the role of the citizen in the outbreak. Both the central and the Delhi governments adopted a similar rhetoric of underscoring the role of the citizens in both creating conditions for the onset of the epidemic and being responsible for its control. They painted a grim picture of an indifferent and irresponsible population which had to be disciplined. This image of an uncaring and apathetic populace, referred to earlier in the article, was reiterated in the expressed views of politicians. Delhi residents were castigated on several counts. In addition to not cooperating in the fumigation operations, they were chastised for not taking adequate personal precautions, such as covering the body, using mosquito repellent creams, and spraying insecticides in their homes. Then, they were also blamed for resorting to self-medication and going to private doctors and traditional healers ill qualified to deal with this condition, and eventually landing up at the government hospitals when it was too late. Most importantly, they were censured for not removing stagnant water in their homes, especially from water coolers, thus facilitating the breeding of *aedes aegypti* mosquitoes.

In its daily newspaper notices giving information on the symptoms, management and prevention of dengue, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi repeatedly warned that 'Persons creating mosquito-genic (*sic*) conditions shall be prosecuted!' This was followed by a regular tally of the number of persons prosecuted for this offence derived from household surveys in the domestic fumigation work. In the context of the use of legal sanctions, it is necessary to highlight the distinction between legal provisions, as available in the rule book, and their actual implementation in specific situations. The Delhi government's invocation of certain provisions of the local MCD and NDMC Acts empowering it to take legal action against private citizens in whose homes the dengue-causing mosquito was found to be breeding, has to be examined in the context of the relationship of the state to its citizens.

Thus, the people at large were held responsible both for the onset of the disease and for its rapid spread by not cooperating with the government agencies in their surveillance and control activities. The city government counsels repeatedly complained that people were not opening their doors and windows during the fogging operations. Reporting on the fogging operations, the MCD counsel told the High Court:

> Over the weekend, I visited Bapa Nagar and Kaka Nagar.[13] I noticed that while people on the first and second floors said that fogging had not been done, those residing on the ground floor and in the galleries said that it had been done. Even the watchman said it had. Then, I got it done, and when I went the next day, people denied, Mylord, that it had been done. I also observed that when people were asked to open their windows during the fogging operation, they actually closed those that were already open. People in Pandara Park[14] said, 'We don't want fogging. Please go!' The residents of these areas are bureaucrats and other senior government officials.

In this way, the government agencies tried to shift the onus of responsibility onto the people. They sought to create the impression that everything was under control and that they were on the job, but that it was the people who were obstructing their work. While the lower classes have often been accused of spreading squalor and disease on account of their filthy and degraded habits, in the dengue crisis it was the affluent urban middle classes who were considered to be both the culprits and the main victims. It was not the slum-dwellers, but educated people and bureaucrats who were not clearing stagnant water in and around their houses, and not cooperating in the fogging operations. Scientific knowledge of the breeding habits of the *aedes aegypti* mosquito was marshalled to establish the connection between social class and the disease dengue. For instance, the Municipal Health Officer informed the court in connection with the cleaning of a polluted drain:

> Najafgarh drain[15] can be cleared in two days, but it has nothing to do with dengue! The mosquito is in your house, in my house. It is a day biter breeding in artificial water in the house. It breeds in flower pots, in tyres, even in cups and saucers! It is breeding in coolers. There are thirty-five *lakh* coolers in Delhi. The drain is polluted water. *Aedes* mosquito breeds in clean stagnant water.

Since the *aedes-aegypti* mosquito breeds in fresh clean water in domestic spaces, it was suggested that the administration was not entirely responsible either for the onset or for the control of the disease. Like the Municipal Health Officer, other medical experts and community health specialists also shifted the onus of responsibility onto the

[13] Residential areas in south Delhi, whose main inhabitants are bureaucrats.
[14] Another government residential colony near Bapa Nagar and Kaka Nagar.
[15] A large drain situated in the Najafgarh area of west Delhi.

people, especially middle-class residents.[16] Since the 1996 dengue epidemic caught public attention mainly after media reports of doctors and other high-level functionaries being among the affected and dead, one can speculate that earlier outbreaks of the disease in the capital during the 1980s and early 1990s did not affect the middle classes to the same extent.

Even after the end of the epidemic in December 1996, dengue continued to occupy a prominent position in the judicial, media and administrative discourses. The court hearings continued with the focus shifting from management of a public health emergency to larger issues of prevention and control. Newspaper columns like 'Viral spiral' were replaced by such captions as 'Dengue watch' and 'Epidemic watch', which kept a tab on the situation.

The sanitary model of public health management, focusing on the disciplining of citizens, was more rigorously pursued by the administration. Action plans focusing on public education, vector surveillance, sanitation and early detection of suspected cases were prepared both by the central and Delhi governments. The latter also took recourse to preventive legislation. Dengue was declared a dangerous disease under Section 2(9)(b) of the MCD Act, 1957, *vide* a *Delhi Gazette* notification dated 25 April 1997. Under this enactment, all private practitioners, nursing homes and government hospitals are required to notify suspected dengue cases to the Municipal Health Officer. Causing mosquito breeding, and consequently endangering the lives of others, has been made a cognisable offence under Section 188 of Indian Penal Code (disobeying an Act promulgated by a public servant).

Regular notices appeared in the newspapers exhorting people to take necessary precautions or face prosecution. Such public notices as the following, issued by the Delhi Municipality, raise important issues:

> It is a matter of concern that despite a number of notices, warnings in the press and personal health education by domestic breeding checkers, some citizens of Delhi are not taking steps to prevent mosquito breeding thus endangering lives of others. MCD has been forced to

[16] A short stint of fieldwork in the casualty department of four government hospitals at the height of the outbreak revealed that, out of a sample of twenty hospitalised dengue patients, ten patients were daily wage workers, four were professionals and two were class IV government employees, while the remaining four were petty traders. Thus, over 50 per cent of the patients in our sample came from households which would be classified as lower- or lower-middle-class by any system of stratification. Although this finding is not statistically significant, it is mentioned here to highlight the fact that the narrative experiences of the poor were eclipsed in the public discourse on the event.

> prosecute 3944 persons out of which more than 200 persons are facing prosecution under section 188 IPC (Indian Penal Code) under which penalty is imprisonment upto six months and fine upto RS. 1000- or both. MCD is launching a special drive for prosecution u/s IPC during the month of October 1997 (*The Hindustan Times*, 4 October 1997).

A large army of domestic checkers (3,333 persons according to the Chief Municipal Health Officer [*The Times of India*, 19 August 1997]) was employed by the municipal bodies to survey houses for the presence of the dengue-causing mosquito, and to educate people on the importance of not letting water collect in and around their houses.

The Delhi Health Minister was even quoted as having stated that the Cabinet had approved a proposal to levy a fine of Rs. 500 on persons in whose homes the *aedes* mosquito was found by the surveillance staff. This recommendation was waiting to take the shape of an ordinance (*The Times of India*, 17 May 1997). Even a proposal to ban coolers was discussed at a dengue review meeting chaired by the Delhi Chief Minister. A person in possession of a cooler could be prosecuted with a six-month imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1,000 (*The Hindustan Times*, 20 July 1997).

Politicians and officials working in the public healthcare sector were also unanimous in their criticism of private medical practitioners of all types, ranging from biomedical practitioners to alternative healers. The refusal of some of these practitioners to treat patients suffering from dengue was considered to be a major hurdle in the state's management strategy. Consequently, the Delhi government's decision to prosecute doctors who refused to treat persons suspected of suffering from dengue was upheld by the public health officials.

Several private doctors were fined for diagnosing patients to be suffering from dengue but not informing the authorities (*The Pioneer*, 26 April 1997). Doctors in the private sector, it was reported, were afraid to report cases for fear of victimisation. As one agitated private practitioner explained: 'Instead of taking dengue control measures, the authorities have decided to fight dengue by issuing notices to doctors. If a doctor informs the municipal authorities about a dengue case, they start victimising him' (*The Hindustan Times*, 28 September 1997).

Such draconian measures not only go against the humanist ideals of a welfare state but, more importantly, they highlight the state's helplessness in dealing with a situation for which it should have taken pre-emptive action. When faced with a crisis, the state seems to swing between the extreme position of refusing to acknowledge the existence of a crisis, and taking recourse to repressive measures.

August 10th and September 10th were declared Dengue Prevention Day and Anit-Dengue Day respectively. The Municipality was reported to be undertaking special drives to educate the people on preventive measures at the outset of the dengue season. Between August and November 1997, the official figures for Delhi put the case load at 260 and the death toll at a single digit. Since then, dengue has made its yearly appearance in the capital during the post-monsoon season, but official figures on total number of cases have been statistically insignificant, and no fatalities have been reported.

VI
Conclusion

This multi-sited ethnography of an epidemic outbreak raises a number of issues regarding research methodology, state responsibility and crisis management in the context of public health emergencies. The importance of a multi-sited approach is revealed by the fact that events at one site are knit together with events at other interconnected sites. Thus, the construction of dengue as primarily a disease of the urban middle classes was a predominant theme permeating the judicial, administrative and media discourses.

The analysis of discourses produced by different agencies of the state illustrates the manner in which the modern Indian state constructs itself as the protector of its citizens. Judicial intervention becomes yet another occasion for it to produce legitimacy through its own agencies. The court had to tread a thin boundary between negligence and criminalisation. In the initial *suo motu* litigation, the Delhi government was prosecuted for criminal negligence, but in the end no one was penalised. The court attempted to negotiate between blaming the government and making the administration perform its functions to control the outbreak. Interestingly, while the political system, the civic administration and the healthcare system were discredited, the judicial system gained popular legitimacy through the public discourse on the event.

The configuration of citizens simultaneously as sufferers and as perpetrators enabled the state to exonerate itself from the charges of negligence in taking pre-emptive action, and to resort to coercive measures. The incidence of dengue among the middle- and upper-middle-class strata in the upmarket areas of Delhi facilitated the creation of a class-based stereotype of dengue. Class, ethnicity and gender are well-known criteria of stereotyping within society. In the present case, the conflation

of class and epidemiological grouping resulted in the creation of certain stereotypical images that enabled the state not only to abdicate responsibility, but also to resort to repressive and coercive measures. The implication of such action for ideas of state and citizenship is a theme which requires further investigation.

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Fifty years after Indian independence and at the end of a momentous century, a puzzling combination of unyielding deprivation and successful self-assertion characterises that large section of the population known as Dalits (the erstwhile 'Untouchables'). Despite growing awareness and considerable political organisation among them, the Dalits still commonly lack the resources to provide an adequate material life for themselves or even secure a better future for their children through education. This volume, the first in a new series, constitutes an important effort to understand the paradoxical situation of the Dalits to capture the realities at the grassroots.

Among the aspects discussed are the initiatives of Dalits to break out of the limitations imposed by ancient traditions; the strategies devised by them and the cultural resources they draw upon; and both the successes and failures of these initiatives.

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Common property, forest management and the Indian Himalaya

Arun Agrawal

This article examines contributions to the literature on common property regimes that govern natural resources. The article also seeks to analyse the relevance of this literature for resource management in the Indian Himalaya. Writings on common property have been instrumental in developing a theoretical justification for decentralisation of environmental policies around the world. Nonetheless, they have been relatively inattentive to issues of power and the larger socio-political context within which most common property regimes are embedded. Research in the Himalayan mountains not only stands to benefit from using theoretical approaches based on studies of common property, but can also enrich the study of common property because of the long history of commons management in the region

In the last twenty years, the literature on common property has grown swiftly, finding stimulus in increasing concerns regarding resource degradation and depletion, and drawing upon developments in game theory, ethnographic writings and critical social analyses. Insights from work on the commons are especially relevant on the Indian context, both because a large proportion of India's poor depend in such resources (Jodha 1986, 1992) and also because a number of South Asianist scholars have made important contributions to this stream of work (Agarwal 1994; CSE 1982, 1985; Gadgil and Guha 1992; Gadgil and Malhotra 1982; Guha 1989; Gupta 1985; Ostrom 1990; Sundar 1997; Wade 1994). This article, in reviewing some of the major themes in the writings on the commons, seeks to assess critically some of the achievements of these writings, especially as they are relevant to the use and management of forest resources in the Indian Himalaya. The continued outpouring of

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research from within the common property paradigm and the vitality of research on mountain ecologies ensures that a review of the literature on these themes can only attempt to strike a moving target. Yet, the very enormity of the work indicates the need for some stocktaking.

The subject of common property has provoked research for a long time, and scholarship from such fields as economic history, human ecology, cultural ecology, resource economics and rural sociology has provided investigations that have had very similar concerns as do the writings that constitute the field of common property today. The trickling literature on common property turned into a flood, beginning from the mid-1980s, especially after the publication in 1986 of the Proceedings of the Conference on Common Property Resources, organised under the auspices of the National Research Council in 1985 (NRC 1986). Many of the scholars whose work was represented in this collection were instrumental in the formation of the International Association for the Study of Common Property in 1989, and in altering some of the earlier perceptions about the commons. Punctuated by important recent works, several of them edited collections (Berkes 1989; Bromley 1992a; McCay and Acheson 1987; NRC 1986; Netting 1981; Ostrom 1990; Peters 1994; Pinkerton 1989; Stevenson 1991; Wade 1994), the literature on common property can lay claim to a quite significant achievement: spreading the awareness that local communities can manage resources effectively, sometimes more effectively than governments or private owners. Drawing upon theoretical insights from writings on property rights and collective action, often using game-theoretical models and statistical techniques to generate insights about resource use in developing countries, scholars of common property have successfully provoked interest in alternative regimes of resource use among scholars and policy-makers alike. Together with writings about indigenous knowledge and peoples, the common property literature has helped erode the perception that rural communities are traditional and inefficient users of resources (Brokensha et al. 1980; Gupta 1992; Warren et al. 1991). In no small measure, the work of common property scholars has led to new policy initiatives in more than fifty countries whose governments claim today to be advancing towards greater involvement of communities in their resource management programmes (FAO 1999). To mention these achievements of the common property literature is not to gloss over some of its weaknesses. Indeed, only by understanding such omissions and occlusions might it be possible to suggest directions for further research.

The next section discusses some of the significant elements in the intellectual and methodological pedigree of the literature on the commons. A greater concern with dwindling renewable resources, and a shared disbelief that local communities are the primary culprits in declining resource bases, motivate much research on the commons. The second section examines the major conclusions and achievements of this literature. The third section shifts the focus, paying critical attention to some weaknesses. These weaknesses, I suggest, result from a rather exclusive focus on the community and, as such, can be explained by the particular objectives of the researchers of the commons. Resource use and management in the Indian Himalaya, especially in relation to forests, is the subject of the fourth section. This section also discusses how the terrain of forest management in the Indian Himalaya presents a splendid opportunity to carry out research that can help address some of the weaknesses in the literature on the commons.

I
Intellectual and methodological precursors

Current writings on the commons are a collaborative enterprise in which cultural anthropologists, students of comparative politics, resource economists, economic historians and social historians have played a highly significant role. The origins of contemporary writings on the commons can be traced to three motivations. The first of these has occurred in response to a raft of scholarship that saw common ownership as the source of inefficiencies and common property as the hallmark of tradition. Perhaps the best-known work that portrayed the commons as inefficient is Garrett Hardin's (1968) flawed analysis of the 'tragedy of the commons' that found wide popular acceptance, and now has been thoroughly repudiated by serious social science scholars.

The substantive motivation of the literature on the commons, no doubt, can be seen as the reaction to the widely held belief that communal ownership of resources is traditional and inefficient. But to counter successfully the belief in the inefficiency of common property, it is necessary: (*a*) to identify conditions under which collective action to build commons institutions and use resources can take place in relatively small groups of people; and (*b*) to explore and delineate the importance of different forms of property rights, more generally institutions, on multiple types of renewable resources (forests, fisheries, irrigation and

drinking water, and pastures). These two objectives are precisely the task that scholars of common property have set themselves.

To move successfully towards answering the host of questions that these two goals raise, scholars of commons have usually pursued case studies and compiled ethnographic descriptions of an immense number of communities from around the world. In orienting their studies they have used two somewhat different methodological and theoretical perspectives. One of these uses assumptions and techniques of analysis from what may broadly be called the rational choice approach, chief among them being new institutionalism, property rights and transaction costs frameworks. The other approach possesses a more descriptive orientation, relies far more on ethnographic field methods, and ascribes to historical and socio-cultural factors greater explanatory power.[1]

The first trickle of writings from the rational choice perspective on the commons had already begun to appear in the 1950s. Alchian's (1950) analysis of the emergence of organisational forms used evolutionary theory to suggest that more efficient organisations will, over time, displace those that are less efficient. This insight was picked up in much later work belonging to new institutional economics, helping to confirm the belief that common property, being traditional, is less efficient. Gordon's (1954) work on open access resources showed how their economic rents could be dissipated by individuals competing with each other. He analysed fisheries but used a general model that could be extended to other resource types. His use of the phrase 'common-property' to denote an open access regime, however, was used later by Demsetz (1967), and also influenced Hardin's mistaken analysis of pastures (1968).

Beginning from the early 1980s, the orientation of many scholars working on the commons began to change. Dahlman (1980) and McCloskey (1990) wrote on the open field system to show the efficiency of open fields for pasture and scattering for agricultural production.[2] These systems of cultivation disappeared in England with industrialisation, but the reasons for their disappearance are a complex combination of factors, including political strategies used by sheep-owners to promote enclosures. Similarly, the distinction between common property and open access resources is now well recognised. Recent work on the

[1] Many studies of the commons have consciously utilised elements from both these approaches (Agrawal 1999; Ostrom 1990; Ostrom et al 1994).

[2] See Agrawal (1996) for a comparative static analysis of the relative efficacy of community, private and state institutions in helping to manage forest resources in the Indian Himalayas.

commons has often relied extensively on game theory and rational choice analyses, and has focused on the relationship between individual preferences, incentive structures and the aggregation of individual preferences into social outcomes. Much of this work has demonstrated the complex relationship between tenure and resource use, in the process showing the hastiness inherent in positing a straightforward relationship between outcome characteristics such as efficiency, equity or sustainability; resources of different types; and property forms such as private, public or common.[3] However, a number of concrete achievements have also resulted from highly abstract analyses that rely on quite restrictive assumptions about individuals, states of the world, and incentive structures (see Section II).

Writings sharing a more socio-cultural and descriptive orientation have been available from anthropologists and historians since even before the 1950s. Earlier works often appeared as ethnographies that described entire peoples and their livelihoods, including the extent to which cooperative strategies formed part of the repertoire of survival (Berreman 1972 [1963]; Mead 1961 [1937]; Netting 1981; Turnbull 1961). More recent writings (Buck 1989; Little 1985; McCay and Acheson 1987; McKean 1992; W. Mitchell 1976) have provided detailed accounts of how rural residents around the world use commonly shared renewable resources. These writings had earlier been criticised for not taking sufficient account of history in detailing the lives of their subjects, but we now possess a significant body of work that recognises and shows the dynamic and changing nature of customary tenurial systems, the changes such systems undergo even without external contact, and their relationship with higher levels of authority within the macro-political systems in which they are located.[4]

II
Findings and accomplishments of the commons literature

The literature on common property has had a strong theoretical core and practical orientation. Whereas many earlier writings on the environment

[3] For empirical work that demonstrates the complexity of tenure among land based resources, see Fortmann and Riddell (1985) and Singh (1986).

[4] See, for example, Baviskar (1995), Lansing (1991), Leach (1994), Ortner (1989), Peluso (1992), Rigby (1985) and Tsing (1993). Although many of these scholars may not self-identify as writing about common property, their work provides ample evidence on how different groups use resources that are not owned by a single entity, and the changes that use and management patterns register over time.

and its management, after lamenting the loss of natural resources and environmental degradation, pointed to the state or the market as the natural alternatives depending on the ideological persuasion of the analyst (de Alessi 1980; G. Hardin 1978; Heilbroner 1974; Ophuls 1973), commons theorists have identified a third alternative that is rooted in the practices of millions of households around the world, but resonates with the theoretical puzzles that also concern scholars of social movements and revolutions, voting and other forms of political participation, collusion and cheating, formation of institutions and their maintenance, cooperation and conflict. Participants in all these situations attempt to solve problems related to collective action. By investigating the conditions under which users of renewable resources cooperate towards efficient management (or fail to do so), the literature on common property has created the grounds on which its findings can resonate with broader concerns in the social sciences.

By locating themselves in the literatures on property rights and collective action, and by using abstract game-theoretic models to represent strategic choice, commons theorists have ensured that their contributions resonate with those of scholars who are also interested in using similar models of choice. Thus, the work on common property has been well received by scholars of international relations and institution formation, in part because of their willingness to use such games as the Prisoners' Dilemma, Chicken, Assurance and Coordination.[5] The literature on the commons has also contributed significantly to discussions of property by emphasising property as a relation among persons with respect to things, rather than being a thing itself, by recognising multiple forms of property because of differences in tenurial systems, and by showing that property is not a single indivisible thing, but a collection of enforceable claims. Common property theorists have also demonstrated that no single form of property can be efficient across historical and social contexts.[6] Although many of these assertions are fast becoming part of conventional wisdom within academic writing, their acceptance is in large measure a consequence of the vast empirical work conducted by scholars of the commons.

[5] Ostrom's work on micro-level common property resource management has resonated closely with the work of theorists of international relations such as Robert Keohane, Duncan Snidal and Oran Young. See the papers by these authors in the special issue of the *Journal of theoretical politics*, October 1994.

[6] See Bromley (1992b), Feeny (1992), McKean (1996), Naughton-Treves and Sanderson (1995) and Ostrom (1992b).

Commons theorists, in investigating the impact of different institutional structures on resource management, have made a critical contribution in showing the importance of formal and informal institutions as an influence on human behaviour. They have drawn and built upon the works of other property rights theorists and institutionalists such as Barzel (1989), Bates (1989), Knight (1992), Libecap (1990), North (1990), but have produced additional evidence to show that institutions exert an enormous influence over human actions. Because they have conceptualised institutions deliberately in an abstract manner, as sets of enforceable rules that facilitate and constrain human action, their conclusions about property rights, a subset of institutions, possess significant generalisability. Property rights institutions, conceptualised as sets of rules that define access, use, exclusion, management, monitoring, sanctioning and the arbitration behaviour of users with respect to specific resources (Schlager and Ostrom 1992), are not only highly significant in governing patterns of use, but are also the principal policy mechanism to reorient human actions in regard to these same resources (Alchian and Demsetz 1973; de Alessi 1980; Furubotn and Pejovich 1974).

Many scholars of the commons have also emphasised the political nature of institutions. Institutions come into being as consequences of human actions, and allow specific individuals and groups to reap advantages from altered social circumstances rather than allowing societies as a whole to capture efficiency gains. In this connection, the work of Knight (1992) and Bates (1981, 1989) is especially important in highlighting the influence of politics. Earlier property rights theorists had suggested, using a functionalist evolutionary logic, that over time inefficient institutions are eliminated and efficient institutions survive (Alchian 1950; Barzel 1989; Demsetz 1967; Friedman 1953; North and Thomas 1973). Now, scholars recognise the fact that institutions are not only instrumental in facilitating production but are also critical allocative and political entities. Because institutions change as a result of attempts by specific social actors, institutional change is likely to occur only when actors perceive gains from change, and the emergence of new institutions is a highly political affair (Gibson 1999). Whether new institutions that emerge will also be efficient for a society depends on the extent to which the interests of groups attempting institutional change match those of the larger collectivity.

Rational choice approaches to the study of the commons, by their clear focus on decision-making and institutions, at least have the potential to enrich ethnographic studies of commons use. The most interesting

possibilities of mutual enrichment exist in the analysis of power, and in the study of how political asymmetries across social groups affect their interactions and resource management related outcomes. Ethnographically thick approaches are critical to a better understanding of how power informs and shapes relations among people and collectivities. They are necessary, if not always sufficient, to produce insights about the hidden agendas of different actors and the motivations that might impel action. Rational choice approaches, on the other hand, promise the technical means through which to analyse these relationships more generally.

In terms of empirical research, by producing impressive documentation from around the world on the capacity of communities to manage resources, commons scholars have contributed to a groundswell of altered policy orientation towards local communities. Studies of successful community management of coastal fisheries, forests, pastures, irrigation and ground water,[7] in conjunction with other writings on people's participation and indigenous knowledge, have encouraged many governments around the world to attempt resource co-management programmes which would legally assign local communities some share in control over and benefits from resources such as wildlife, forests, pastures, irrigation and rural infrastructures (Agrawal and Gibson 2001; Agrawal and Ribot 1999; FAO 1999). Clearly, in many of these cases local communities possess only very limited authority, and gain only small amounts. But the altered policy environment constitutes a substantial change over the situation two decades ago when resource degradation was often viewed as a direct consequence of the destructive and erosive activities of local communities and small peasants (G. Hardin 1968). Increasing the stakes of communities in the management of common pool resources is seen by governments today as an effective policy instrument to manage resources.

Commons scholars have also attempted to intervene in the charged debate on overpopulation and resource degradation by arguing that institutions always mediate the effects of macro-structural and demographic

[7] The empirical and case literature on commons is far too large to receive even a representative mention in this article. Some of the best sources for this literature are the volumes of collected papers edited by Berkes (1989), Bromley (1992a), McCay and Acheson (1987), NRC (1986), Pinkerton (1989) and Western and Wright (1994). The journal *Human ecology* has been an effective vehicle for research on common property over the last decade-and-a-half. For relatively recent works on irrigation see Ostrom (1992a) and Tang (1992), for fisheries, see Schlager (1990); for ground water, see Blomquist (1992); for rural infrastructure, see Ostrom et al. (1993); for forestry, see Ascher (1995) and Brower (1987); and for pastures, see Agrawal (1999), Galaty and Bonte (1991), Galaty and Johnson (1990) and Peters (1994).

factors on resource use patterns. As such, the manner and extent of the influence of large demographic and economic changes will always be mediated through local-level institutions. Without attention to the precise ways in which local institutions modulate larger changes, one cannot hope to arrive at useful inferences about the impact of population, market and other economic forces on resource conditions (Agrawal and Yadama 1997).

These modifications in perceptions about the role of institutions have been founded upon solid theoretical and empirical research. This research recognises the role of incentives and interests in shaping human behaviour. As it treats individuals as decision-makers, it recognises Marx's admonition that their decisions take place in conditions that are not of their own choosing, but that humans possess the capacity to sometimes alter their circumstances. Thus a number of writings have undertaken important theoretical development to focus on the commons dilemmas that confront communities of users (Cheung 1970; Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975; Dasgupta and Heal 1979; R. Hardin 1982; Oakerson 1992; Ostrom 1986, 1990; Runge 1981, 1984). These writings have helped clarify the nature of resources that are used jointly, how technological or institutional aspects of use can influence resource characteristics, and how the structure of the situations in which resources are utilised affects use and management decisions and use patterns.

Indeed, it is the institutional nature of the analysis conducted by common property theorists that makes their work so valuable in recent discussions of the decentralisation of environmental management. Around the world, more than fifty countries have now begun to involve local communities and lower-level decision-making units in protecting and managing the environment (FAO 1999). These new policy trends are based on the recognition that the fiscal capacity of the state to undertake coercive conservation is limited and that communities can often manage their resources better than private actors negotiating through market based exchanges. In many cases, communities are seen also to be characterised by high levels of social capital that permits them to undertake collective tasks far more efficiently in comparison to state bureaucracies, and to do so far more equitably than market based solutions. Indeed, recent work on common property has begun to draw upon the vast literature on social capital (Putnam 1993). Several scholars have begun to examine the extent to which common property institutions are based upon stocks of social capital and whether and how they enhance the networks through which social capital is generated (Katz 2000; Muldavin 2000; Pretty and Ward 2001; Robbins 2000).

III
Weaknesses of the commons literature

Despite their significant achievements, writings on commons suffer from several shortcomings. Some problems can be addressed within the current framework of research, perhaps with minor adjustments in the strategies of research, greater attention to theoretical rigour and/or an expansion of the scope of analysis. Others are less likely to get resolved so easily. In attempting to understand some of the weaknesses of the literature on the commons, one can explore two types of criticisms, each stemming from very different theoretical positions and epistemological concerns. The first accepts the basic assumptions and questions that commons theorists use to proceed with their analyses: How can one best understand different types of institutional arrangements? What are the physical and social characteristics of resources that influence their use and management? And, is it possible to discern systematic regularities in resource use and property regimes that make some forms of property superior to others in governing resource use within given spatio-temporal configurations? These questions, in turn, take certain assumptions about individuals and their social context for granted. Some of these assumptions can be stated concisely: 'Individuals know their interests and these interests define their goals;' 'individuals calculate costs and benefits to choose between alternatives and decide on strategies best suited to achieve chosen alternatives;' and 'efficiency, equity, and sustainability are worthwhile individual and social goals.' Criticisms flowing from the second approach accept neither these assumptions as the most appropriate, nor, consequently, the questions as the most relevant ones.

If one accepts the basic epistemological and ontological presumptions of the commons literature, four main lines of critique can be identified. The most telling of these are, paradoxically, based on precisely those aspects of the commons discourse that account for its achievements in the advocacy of communal management: the focus on the community, and the use of rigorous methodological tools. Their focus on communities, and the consideration of the larger context only to the extent that outside forces may undermine a community's ability to manage resources, has often prevented commons scholars from investigating the complex relationships of communities to macro-political and social phenomena such as the state and social movements, and politics and differentiation within communities.

In much of the literature on common property, outside forces appear primarily as agents of change. Usually the change they prompt is deleterious.

Whether outside forces are in the form of markets or state interventions, they tend to be viewed as disruptive. In the work of commons scholars, they often unsettle the balance communities can precariously achieve to manage their resources. This view of the commons regimes has two unfortunate consequences. One, it fails to acknowledge the possibility that in many instances the balance that communities might achieve in using their resources might be a product of interactions with the state; a result of enabling policies pursued by the state in earlier periods. Even market exchanges might play an important and constructive role in the constitution and creation of viable resource use patterns.[8] If communities are ultimately located within the networks of power and exchange relations constituted at least in part by the policies pursued by a state and the economic forces generated by marketplaces, then state and markets are likely to be quite significant influences even in what appears on the surface to be community and community-based resource management. The analytical lesson is apparent. The role of markets and states, even when they seem absent, needs greater attention in analyses of successful communal resource management, rather than being a factor only when local communities are unable to manage their resources. A related point is the need for commons scholars to focus more critically on the relations of communities with markets and states rather than seeing these social phenomena as independent, or somehow in a contradictory relation with each other (but see Peluso 1992).

While markets and states form part of the descriptive and analytical terrain in the work of commons theorists, other social phenomena such as social movements, protests, agrarian unrest and local resistance seldom articulate with community in their account of resource management. Yet, in many areas of the world where studies of commons are undertaken, the presence of these social phenomena is pervasive. Even the theoretical tools that commons theorists have used to analyse community action and management—game theory, collective action theory and institutional analysis—are conducive to the study of these larger protest movements. The studies of commons and social movements, however, seem to proceed according to independent logics where neither the objects of

[8] Markets are often credited with enlarging the possibilities for sale of products harvested from commonly managed resources. One can at least imagine, however, that they may also facilitate constraints upon harvesting common resources. availability of kerosene can reduce the need for locally produced fuelwood or charcoal; markets in foodgrains might reduce the pressure on agricultural land and consequently reduce the demand for manure and leaf litter from forests; availability of cheap meat from domesticated animals can lead to a decline in the capture and killing of wild animals

analysis nor the phenomena being investigated seem related to each other in a meaningful manner.

Seeing change as primarily a consequence of external forces implies a second unfortunate narrowing of focus. It leads scholars of commons to appreciate only to a limited extent the independently dynamic nature of the communities that they study.[9] What Dirks et al. remark about cultural systems might, with some modification and a great deal of truth, apply to the way commons scholars have depicted the communities they study: 'The virtual absence of historical investigation in anthropology, until recently, has meant that cultural systems have, indeed, appeared timeless, at least until ruptured by "culture contact"' (1994: 3). As the work of a number of theorists suggests, communities and their patterns of interactions can be quite stable, but in many cases the apparent stability is an artifact of what Hobsbawm and Ranger have called 'the invention of tradition' (1983).

Perhaps it is because commons scholars focus primarily on the effectiveness of communities in managing resources that issues of dissent and differentiation within the community receive rather limited attention. Certainly, the analytical structure of investigation and the theoretical foundations of the commons literature do not preclude attention to internal differences within the community.[10] Further, issues of heterogeneity among users are often the subject of theoretical investigation among scholars of commons. Yet, an unintended consequence of focusing on the achievements of communities in managing resources successfully has been to highlight commonly managed resources as having an equitable nature. Thus, Jodha's influential studies of the commons in the South Asian context depict common property as channelling proportionately greater benefits to poor residents of the village (1986, 1992). Somanathan's study of the forest councils in the Kumaon shows them as being highly effective in

[9] In thinking about how local communities can alter the rules of the games that guide their interactions, however, Ostrom's work has attempted, even within a game-theoretic paradigm, to address the issue of change initiated within a community (1990: 15–18).

[10] In Oakerson's (1992) framework, which is perhaps the most widely used single tool to frame case studies on the commons (having been used both in the edited volume by NRC [1986] as well as Bromley's [1992a] volume), inequalities are associated far more closely with outcomes than with decision-making arrangements or patterns of interactions. The model, clearly, does not preclude a consideration of inequalities, but neither does it pay special attention to them

benefiting village communities as a whole (1990).[11] It must, however, be admitted that recent scholarship has begun to take internal differentiation within communities seriously and has presented interesting analyses of the differing interests and actions of social groups within what is often seen as a community (Gibson and Stuart 1995; Moore 1998b; Neumann 1995; Peluso 1995; Rangan 1995; Rocheleau and Ross 1995).

Despite some attention to political struggles and issues of equity within the community, one oversight is the failure of commons scholars to pay adequate attention to the influence of gender on resource use and management. Since livelihood tasks are differentiated by gender in many subsistence oriented societies, it is reasonable to ask how gender roles in these societies influence the utilisation of and control over common resources. For the most part, however, the mainstream of commons scholars has paid only scant attention to gender in their analyses. An immense literature on gender in development and resource management is simply crying out for attention from students of the commons.[12]

Recognition of the multiple ways in which communities managing resources are linked with and depend upon market forces, other social actors/phenomena, and political actors comprising the state would tend to blur the boundaries between communities and other social aggregations. This might, in part, explain why commons scholars have tended not to investigate the relations of communities with external groups. But it has also meant that the literature on the commons has continued to remain fascinated with a small number of different forms of property rights institutions—most commonly, private, communal and public, but at times including open access, corporations and co-operatives as other possible forms of property.[13] In seeing forms of property as being comprised by a small number of *categories*, scholars

[11] Presentation of community resource management as being equitable by commons scholars has, perhaps, inadvertently been aided by the studies belonging to a moral economy perspective where communities, owing to norms of generalised reciprocity, try to ensure that all members get at least a minimum level of subsistence. For a discussion of the 'moral economy' see Scott (1976) and Thompson (1971). See also Polanyi's discussion of premarket and market economies (1957).

[12] Among the more careful analyses of gender and property relations in the context of the broad conceptual formation of environment/development are works by scholars such as Agarwal (1997, 1998), Jewett (2000) and Locke (1999).

[13] Thus, even as he argues for a more nuanced understanding of property regimes, Bromley tends to suggest that the relevant comparison is among private, state and common property (1992b: 4).

of common property tend to inadvertently restrict the potential of their own institutional analysis.[14]

In addition, a methodological criticism can also be advanced.[15] Scholars of commons generally focus on single communities when conducting empirical work. But their conclusions with respect to these communities become harder to generalise without comparative work across resource types, historical periods and spatial locations, or without taking the effects of these variations into account. There are very few studies of the commons that have attempted systematically to draw conclusions on the basis of variations across cases. One of the reasons Elinor Ostrom's *Governing the commons* has found an appreciative readership is precisely that it uses cases differing on a number of dimensions to make inferences about when community management of resources might be successful.[16]

These criticisms, it can persuasively be argued, do not apply to all writings within the commons literature. Several of the questions raised here have been voiced by theorists of the commons themselves. Further, because there are disciplinary, theoretical and methodological differences among those working on the commons, the above criticisms

[14] The focus on state, market and community can also potentially lead to a blurring of the analytical distinction between actors and rules, especially, but sometimes also between resource characteristics. A number of theorists of the commons have emphasised the need to consider actors, rules and resource characteristics as separate analytic categories, but the very term 'common property resources', as commons scholars recognise, refers simultaneously to a regime of rules, and a type of resource. Since the term 'common management' is really a metaphorical synonym for an immense range of patterns of use and control, and types of outcomes, it might make sense to use the term more in its metaphorical rather than in an analytical sense. The same can be argued in the cases of private and state (public) management of resources (Ostrom, personal communication).

[15] A second possible criticism that I do not discuss is as old as the hoary debate between formalists and substantivists. Attempts by commons scholars to use formal methods of analysis can be criticised on the grounds that such strategies are highly reductionist and do not take into account contextual variables that might be relevant in influencing resource management outcomes, or in and of themselves. While the criticism might well apply to specific pieces of research, it does not apply to the literature on the commons as a whole, since many of its practitioners are anthropologists and other scholars who are specifically concerned to present a wealth of materials on the context in which communities use their resources.

[16] Wade's study of common management of pasture and irrigation in south Indian villages forms another instance of comparative case work but within a single area (1994 [1988]). A more recent extensive comparative work is Baland and Platteau (1996). For the most part, commons scholars have used edited volumes containing essays on multiple cases and resource types. The strategy, however, is not as successful in permitting careful comparative analysis.

should be treated more as statements of general tendencies rather than as literally applicable to all work on the commons.

The second set of criticisms, however, applies more widely to much of the research on the commons. Recent developments in social theory, especially in the shape of contributions from Foucault and other post-structuralists, have provided the grounds for some trenchant critiques of the scholarship on common property. Influenced by themes in the works of recent scholarship on resistance and subalternity,[17] new criticisms question the notion of an autonomous subject, problematise the construction of development, progress and modernisation as inevitable or desirable, focus on how subgroups within local communities resist and subvert the goals of development practitioners, and assert the need to examine the interstitial and pervasive influences of power in the discursive strategies that stand for development and conservation. Thus, Goldman (1997) directly questions the politics of scholars working on common property regimes. Such questioning can be found as well in works that treat development as discursive practice (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994 [1990]), focus on how concepts such as the state are the product of discursive practices (T. Mitchell 1991a [1988], 1991b), or look at the literature on conservation as being unavoidably implicated in relations of power (Vandergeest 1996).

Perhaps the most striking note of critique has been struck through the observation that commons theorists, especially those who use rational choice assumptions, have paid relatively little attention to issues of power and resistance in their research, and have, thereby, failed to examine the effects of some of their basic assumptions regarding the desirability of development, conservation and efficiency. By not examining the internally differentiated nature of the communities they study, commons scholars, it may be suggested, have assumed that all members of these communities

[17] See the exchange of views among Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser (1995); the volume edited by Butler and Scott (1992); and Fraser (1989) for provocative insights from feminist theorists on the notion of the subject; and Fish (1989), Gates (1986) and Said (1979) for some of the themes upon which current deconstructions of the commons and development discourse are based. An introduction to Subaltern Studies is perhaps best pursued through the volume edited by Guha and Spivak (1988). See also the recent discussion in *American historical review* (Cooper 1994; Mallon 1994; Prakash 1994), and Sivaramakrishnan (1995). For a critical introduction to Foucault, see especially the essays on governmentality and discourse in Burchell et al. (1991), the review of Foucault's work edited by Hoy (1986), and the assessment of Foucault by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), especially Foucault's essay in the volume on the subject and power. An accessible introduction to Foucault's thought is also available in his interviews (C. Gordon 1980).

are similarly receptive to ideas of development and efficient resource management, progress and modernisation. But the processes of development and modernisation and attempts to make the use and management of commons more efficient can end up benefiting primarily those who are already privileged, and increasing state capacities to control and intervene in local affairs. By focusing on how common resources can be more efficiently managed, scholars of commons become enmeshed in the same logic of greater productivity that advocates of privatisation talk about (Goldman 1997). This critique of the commons borrows extensively from Foucault's arguments about biopower and biopolitics, effectively deployed by such authors as T. Mitchell (1991a [1988]) to critique colonisation and modernisation in Egypt, by Escobar (1995) to problematise development, and by Ferguson (1994 [1990]) to question development projects initiated by agencies like the World Bank.

Foucault's arguments about biopower point to technologies that developed in Europe in the 18th century to permit increasing control over the economic processes whereby populations of human beings could be adjusted to available resources (1990 [1978]: 138ff). Viewing biopower as the ensemble of regulatory disciplines and techniques for 'subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' (ibid.: 140), Foucault suggests that the emergence of demography and the evaluation of the relationship between resources and inhabitants was critical to the ability to control populations. The state, according to Foucault, might have been important in ensuring the maintenance of production relations, but techniques of biopower operate at every level of the social body and have 'brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life' (ibid.: 143).

Foucault's arguments are based on social and political developments in 18th and 19th century Europe, but recent writers on development and conservation have sought to extend the import of his argument by pointing to how development and efficient management of resources are also reliant on the same technologies of biopower that Foucault highlighted: demographic statistics, resource use patterns, evaluation of relations between resources and populations (carrying capacity), and so forth. Commons scholars, because they are substantially invested in the same broad enterprise of investigating how resources can be more efficiently managed, can be viewed as being subject to the critique that Foucault advances.

The observation that commons scholars are unreflexive about how their research valorises the objectives of modernisation, efficiency and

progress (Goldman 1997) can become compelling only when it marshals greater evidence in support of this proposition. While Escobar and Ferguson have shown how development experts and officials often ignore 'failures' and the impact of such failures on increased capacities of governments, the same critique cannot easily be levelled against commons scholars whose very research focus is aimed at valorising communities at the expense of governments and market institutions alike. To the extent that strengthening communities works against the centralisation of state power, the privatisation of resources and the increasing influence of markets, the literature on the commons actively undermines discourses on modernisation and teleological assumptions regarding progress.

Commons scholars, however, do need to attend better to how power, domination and resistance unfold within communities. Appreciating that there are groups and actors endowed with asymmetrical access to power and resources within a community is to take note of the enormous literature that in recent years has focused in resistance, domination and the subaltern. These writings, sparked by the 'Subaltern School' of historians and the works of James Scott (1985) and Michael Adas (1981) in Southeast Asia, began to gain scholarly attention at about the same time as the work on common property (Colburn 1989). Despite the shared focus of both groups of scholars on those who are marginal and the obvious relevance of the work on resistance to the enterprise of commons scholars, the different theoretical preoccupations have prevented much exchange of ideas.

A greater focus on power within communities can help strengthen considerably the force of writings on commons property. On the one hand, such a shift in focus would facilitate a better understanding of how power and status are related to access and use of resources; on the other, it would complement the exclusive focus of common property theorists on institutions and rules with a greater attention to power and process. Ultimately, we must realise that power is not just what planning and management attempt to exclude, but that power and politics imbue the process of management thoroughly and unavoidably. Management is not just about providing technical solutions to objective problems of development and environmental conservation. Rather, these problems are themselves politically generated, and without attention to the politics that inheres in them it would be impossible to produce ways of addressing poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation.

If existing institutions are the expression of past political alignments, attention to current political relationships within communities can help us gain a better understanding of how existing institutions are being contested, and what the shape of future institutions might be. Institutional arrangements for allocating resources are best viewed as an expression of what the idealised status quo would be like. Actual human behaviour, even in the context of well-enforced institutional rules, is unlikely to conform precisely to institutional contours. Perfect enforcement is far too costly ever to be achieved. When resources devoted to enforcement of institutions are limited, resource use patterns are far more likely to diverge from what the rules specify. Attention to power and micro-politics within communities is therefore critical to understanding how resources are used and managed (Agrawal 1994a, 1999; Gibson 1999; Moore 1998a, 1998b, 1999).

But it is not just the need to explicate better the relationship between property and politics that would be served by greater attention to processes of domination and resistance. The question possesses significant inherent theoretical and practical merit, as subaltern scholars and writers on everyday protest have argued. Attention to strategies followed by subaltern actors in relation to resource use is critical in beginning to understand how attempts at control and regulation are always challenged by those who are subjected to control. Issues of agency, the mutually productive relationship between domination and resistance, and the creation of hegemonic institutional arrangements can be understood only with greater attention to micro-politics. Such a shift in focus can also help address the criticism that scholars of common property have, hitherto, ignored how rural residents can shape attempts by outside agents such as the state or aid agencies to intervene in their lives and modify existing patterns of resource use.

In this context, the micro-foundational focus of common property scholars on human agents can find productive complementarity with those who insist on the transformative capacities of subordinated groups. If intentions and independent actions are critical in reformulating and renegotiating the terrain of resource management imposed by the state (or as it obtains historically), the attempt by commons scholars to understand the strategies whereby village residents craft new institutions to manage local resources may prove to be instrumental in creating new insights about the attempts by these same villagers to reorient development and state interventions.

IV
Potential contributions from the context of forest management in the Indian Himalayas

As scholars have realised that, despite their majesty and grandeur, the Himalayan mountains may be ecologically fragile owing to geological, biophysical as well as human causes, the focus of writings on the Himalaya has shifted to examining how environmental changes in the region can potentially destabilise existing human–resource relationships, and how the environment can be influenced. One of the most significant set of writings has tended to assess the role of local populations in forest use, conservation and exploitation. This section focuses primarily on community forest use and management in the Uttar Pradesh hills in India (Uttarakhand), but uses existing research on other parts of the Himalaya to situate this region in a comparative perspective.

Recent work on the Himalaya underlines nothing as much as the fact that our knowledge about the Himalaya is limited and uncertain. Scholars such as Bajracharya (1983), Carson (1985), Hamilton (1987), Hofer (1993), Ives and Messerli (1989), Mahat et al. (1986a, 1986b, 1987a, 1987b) and Thompson et al. (1986) among others have contested the various aspects of the 'Theory on Himalayan environmental degradation'. They have pointed to woefully inadequate and contradictory empirical data sources on biophysical and socio-economic processes in the mountains. Their arguments cast doubt on assertions that blame subsistence activities of smallholders for environmental degradation. They question the relationship between deforestation and surface erosion in the upper regions of the Himalayan mountains, and flooding and sediment deposition in the lower reaches of the Himalayan rivers. In the wake of this comprehensive interrogation of accepted dogmas about forest management in the mountains, several new research issues have emerged. They bear a close complementary relationship with writings on common property.

The most important of these, perhaps, is the significant reorientation of research on forest use in the Himalaya to take into account the interests and activities of local populations. Although early ethnographers have provided many studies of local systems of resource management (Berreman 1972; Hitchcock 1966; Nitzberg 1970), an explicit focus on communities and user group forestry has emerged in the past two decades reflecting the perception that without extensive involvement and empowerment of Himalayan villagers, successful forest management is

likely to remain a chimera.[18] The long history of local forest management in the Indian Middle Himalaya, and the active involvement of villagers in forest use and management owing to the critical role of forests in subsistence (Agrawal and Yadama 1997; Ballabh and Singh 1988; Guha 1989; Somanathan 1991), provide the basic precondition for using insights from the commons literature to research forest management in the mountains—thousands of semi-autonomous village forest councils (*van panchayats*) help manage large areas of forests collectively for the village community in Kumaon and Garhwal.

Research in these *van panchayats* has explored some of the basic thrusts of the common property literature already. Agrawal and Yadama (1997), Ballabh and Singh (1988) and Somanathan (1991) have investigated the extent to which the *panchayats*, and communal management more generally, might be efficient in helping villagers manage forest resources. But research on community forest management in the hills can also help answer more fruitfully some of the problems faced by commons scholars. Because hill villagers have the right to many of the rules for managing their forests, historical studies of their evolving institutional arrangements can help illuminate how internal dynamics of village communities lead to significant shifts in patterns of resource use. Further, statistical and comparative studies of the forest *panchayats* can help address criticisms that suggest that the commons literature has tended to focus primarily on single cases. Indeed, the emergence of a large literature on local management of forests in the Lesser and Middle Himalaya in Pakistan, Nepal and India now permits detailed and rigorous comparative studies of local collective management of forests as well.[19]

Relatively recent changes in government policies on forest management in the mountains, certainly in India (Sanwal 1989), but also in Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan, create the possibility of comparative research that would examine the effect of macro-level institutional changes on

[18] Indeed, some research already suggests that villagers, in the face of increasing scarcity, are likely to take matters into their own hands and plant trees without much external stimulus (A.S. Carter and Gilmour 1989; E.J Carter 1992, Griffin 1988; Hofer 1993; Virgo and Subba 1994). Such research that examines the conditions under which villagers would plant new trees is extremely important for defining the limits of deterioration of the quality of publicly used forest lands.

[19] See Cernea (1981, 1985), Dani et al. (1987) and Dove and Rao (1986) for some studies of local forest management from Pakistan. For Nepal, see Brower (1990), Chhetri and Pandey (1992), Exo (1990), Metz (1990) and Zurick (1990) An annotated bibliography on common forest management from Messerschmidt (1993) is a useful source as well. The review by Arnold and Stewart (1991) ties together some of the important themes in the pre-1990 work on common property in India

micro-level institutions, forest use practices and forest conditions. In the context of the Uttar Pradesh hills, the forest department and *panchayat* regulations have altered substantially in recent years, and valuable resources for research are available in the form of data on such policy changes, their impact on village forest councils as reflected in records of council meetings maintained at the village level, annual reports on the forest *panchayats* and their productivity, and reports on the activities of the forest department and the state of the forests it manages.

Investigations of the relationship between micro-level community institutions and macro-level state initiatives will help address a persistent criticism of the commons literature—that it has tended to remain focused on the community at the cost of a better understanding of the ways in which the community is located in a network of social relations which the state shapes to a great extent. But the Kumaon and Garhwal region also constitute an important arena for commons scholars to examine another aspect of the relations between broader social forces and institutional arrangements. Research on ecological movements in the Uttarakhand (Berreman 1989; Guha 1989; Jain 1984; Rangan 1993, 2001; Shiva and Bandopadhyay 1989; Weber 1989), and the movement for the separate province of Uttaranchal (Mawdsley 1997, 1998, 1999), demonstrate the pervasive ubiquity of social movements in the region. Indeed, as Agrawal and Yadama (1997) and Agrawal (2001) point out, the birth of commons institutions such as the forest councils of Kumaon is a result of prolonged protests by the Kumaoni. The context of Kumaon and Garhwal thus presents a tremendous opportunity to examine the relationship between community institutions and social movements. Such research can significantly advance our knowledge about how institutions and social movements connect with each other to facilitate continuing collective action.

As far as the situation in the Indian Himalaya forming a significant opportunity to investigate internal differences within communities is concerned, two points might be in order. First, a number of authors have pointed to relatively low hierarchical and class differences in Garhwal and Kumaon (Guha 1989; Pant 1935; Sanwal 1976). This might seem to imply that the opportunity to study class and caste differentiation in the Indian Himalaya is limited. This, however, should not be taken to mean that asymmetries in resources and power play a more limited role in the hills. As Foucault asserts, 'A society without power relations can only be an abstraction' (1983: 222–23). Although the forces that shape how individuals and groups relate to each other vary depending on history and context, there is no escaping the grip of power. What attenuated caste

and class differences in the hills imply is not the absence of power, but simply that its influence may assume subtler forms.

Examples might make the point clearer. Where caste and class explicitly enter social status, and a community is highly polarised along these dimensions, power might be exercised more in the sense of brute force.[20] Where these differences are less obvious, the exercise of power might take place through far subtler means—seemingly equitable strategies that, nonetheless, are biased against those who are socially or economically disadvantaged. Auctions of products from the commons to the highest bidder or high levels of monetary fines as punishment for breaking institutional rules related to commons are two possible examples. The first rule would inevitably lead to richer residents of the village cornering the bulk of benefits from the commons, since poorer members of the community are unlikely to be able to bid even close to the value of the benefits from the entire commons (Agrawal 1994b). The second rule would punish those individuals disproportionately who possess limited private resources, and are therefore forced to resort to harvesting from the commons more often.

Second, despite the fact that power is not polarised along some obvious dimensions in the hill society, the presence of thousands of *van panchayats* in Uttarakhand presents a highly variegated institutional landscape of power whose investigation could help uncover the relationships between societal power and how it congeals along nodes constituted by institutional arrangements. In this sense, the very multiplicity of institutions would assist the investigations of power and politics, as long as one keeps in mind the admonition that 'the analysis of power relations within a society cannot be reduced to the study of a series of institutions, not even to the study of all those institutions which would merit the name "political"' (Foucault 1983: 224).

In this context, the relationship between gender roles and power would form an illuminating area of analysis. While gender roles are quite different in the hill subsistence and production economy, and one can expect these differences to significantly affect forest use and management, women's activities regarding harvesting, use and management of forests need greater documentation and elaboration. The increasing attention to women's work in the hills, therefore, can

[20] See Lukes' thoughtful review of three different views of power (1974). Lukes (1986) provides a useful collection of writings on power. Contemporary efforts to theorise power, especially its more diffused and subtle manifestations, must consider Foucault's interventions.

contribute to filling one of the important lacunae in the scholarship on the commons—the importance of gender in common property management (see Agarwal 1986, 1994; Byers and Sainju 1994; Hewitt 1989; Saksena et al. 1995).

V
Conclusions

This article has reviewed the literature on common property by examining its origins, major themes and weaknesses. Scholarship on common property has an old vintage, but it has exploded since the mid-1980s. It has been crucial in establishing the role of community versus market or state in resource management. Some of the chief weaknesses of the literature relate to its relative neglect of the social and political relationships within which local communities are located, and of the internal politics that characterise all communities.

One of the objectives of this review has been to examine the extent to which forest management in the Indian Himalaya provides research agendas that can help address some of the weaknesses in the commons discourse. The study concludes that the Middle and Lower Himalayas constitute a fertile source of potentially new insights regarding internal differentiation within communities, the relationship between the state and other sites of political authority, the interactions between power and institutions, and how social movements are related to institutions of resource management.

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Social and political dominance in western UP: A response to Sudha Pai

Roger Jeffery, Craig J. Jeffrey and Patricia M. Jeffery

In our critique of a recent article by Sudha Pai (CIS vol. 34, no. 2) we argue that she provides inadequate evidence to support her case that there has been a dramatic change in dominance relationships in western UP. We identify problems of evidence in her claims about the significance of rising education of Chamars, and in the consequences of the changes that have taken place. We also suggest that her account of dominance needs to consider the erstwhile dominant as well as the dominated, and that she ignores evidence of the extent to which previously dominant castes have merely changed the ways in which they enforce compliance when necessary. Her evidence of change is inadequate: she provides perceptions of changes instead. We also question the generalisability of her predictions, and use data from our own ongoing research in Bijnor district to suggest a modified picture of increasing access to schooling among the Chamars of western UP, and its likely effects.

> We showed him and the other Scheduled Castes that one Jat is the same as ten Scheduled Castes in strength and that we have the power [*shakti*] in the village. We showed them that just because they are pampered by the government does not mean that they rule the village (Jat man, Daurala village, Meerut district, August 1997, cited in Jeffrey 2001: 1).

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> In their hearts the Jats do not want the SCs to be able to have hearths [*chūlhās*] burning in their homes, they want SC children to die hungry. The Jats will be doomed. I get very angry with the Jats. They make us work like animals the whole day in their fields. And when the afternoon comes, they give us cane tops in place of money. God alone will make justice for us. We have to endure their tyranny (Chamar woman, Nangal village, Bijnor district, April 2001).

In a recent paper in this journal, Sudha Pai has argued that four villages of Meerut district 'are in a phase of transition from control by the dominant caste/rich peasants of the region based upon the traditional caste hierarchy and skewed distribution of land, to a more democratic system in which the lower castes/classes are able to assert themselves' (Pai 2000: 216). This conclusion surprised us, for two main reasons. First, one of us (CJ) conducted his doctoral research among Jats in the same Community Development Block studied by Pai, at roughly the same time. His evidence suggests that Jats were aware that their dominance was being challenged, but were well able to resist that threat (Jeffrey 2001). Second, all three of us are currently conducting research in two villages in Bijnor district, immediately adjacent to Meerut. One of these villages is similar in many respects to the villages described by Pai, but our data do not show the changing patterns of dominance she claims.

We have felt impelled to respond to Pai's paper by a close reading of it. We argue that Pai has presented inadequate evidence to support her argument, and we identify four main problems with her account:

1. Inadequate rigour in the collection and presentation of her data, especially with respect to her treatment of historical change.
2. Her account of dominance is non-relational, and she gives insufficient attention to how dominance may be asserted by erstwhile dominant groups, such as through control over the local police and judiciary, restrictions on access to space, or sexual harassment.
3. She fails to distinguish perceptions of change from other indicators of change, particularly with respect to claims that SCs as a whole are entering into a new form of democratic politics.
4. She generalises unwarrantedly from her four villages to the rest of western UP.

In this response we will therefore ask, first, whether Pai presents a convincing account of change in the villages she studied. Then, whether or not her argument is valid for the villages she studied, we need to ask if her account is likely to apply more widely in western UP, as she claims. Finally, we present the outline of a modified account, based on our own data.

I
Pai's data and main argument

Pai's paper is part of an on-going effort to understand the changing nature of social relations in rural western UP. Recent work has focused on how far the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has changed the relationships between Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 'dominant' strata. The BSP has attempted to increase the SCs' political visibility and security, and their wealth and incomes, both through mobilisation and through their access to power as members of three UP state governments in the 1990s. In earlier collaborative work, Pai argued that the BSP increased SC representation in local administrations and tightened legislation relating to inter-caste violence (Pai and Singh 1997). She also suggested that the BSP's support for the Jatavs or Chamars (the largest and most powerful SC *jāti* in western UP) heightened tensions between them and other SC and Other Backward Caste (OBC) *jātis*, especially with the so-called 'Most Backward Castes' (MBCs) (see also Duncan 1999; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Lerche 1999).

In Pai (2000) she makes stronger claims about changing social dynamics in rural western UP. She draws primarily on schooling and occupational data from 210 respondents, as well as on interview material with *pradhāns* (council leaders) and others in four large SC-majority villages near Meerut. She argues that there has been a transformation of authority in rural western UP. In claiming that the BSP has successfully undermined the economic, social and political power of erstwhile dominant castes, Pai's argument departs from other research (that she does not cite) on micro-politics in western UP.[1] Despite the BSP's relative lack of electoral success in this part of western UP, Pai argues that it has established itself as a social movement, and has been able to transform traditional structures of rural dominance in two main ways. First, Dalits

[1] See, for example, Lieten (1996) on dominant caste control of local *panchāyats*; Jeffery and Jeffery (1997) on Jat dominance of employment opportunities, and Jeffrey and Lerche (2000) on differential access to the police and other local state institutions.

(especially Chamars) have used education 'to compete economically with the upper castes' (p. 190). Furthermore, 'the spread of education among the lower castes in the rural areas has introduced social awareness and enabled diversification of the occupational structure' (p. 192). Second, SCs have furthered their collective cause by obtaining access to government resources, such as subsidised loans and grants for house building, by winning positions of *pradhān* within local government *panchāyats*.

We shall explore these problems in the next two sections of our response. We should note at the outset, however, some of our disquiet at how little information Pai provides on her research methods—household selection, who carried out the interviews, their content, and how the material was analysed. In the data presented in her paper we do not hear the voices of Pai's respondents, and as a result her account is flat and lacking in nuance. In Section IV we consider a further methodological weakness: the significance of the highly atypical villages chosen by Pai for her study. Throughout, the reader should be aware of the many well-known problems of deriving arguments about social change from data drawn from one point in time: although there are surrogate ways of assessing social change despite having no base-line data, Pai does not seem to have used them. We shall draw attention to the problems of assessing the extent and nature of social change only where they seem to be especially significant in undermining the credibility of Pai's argument.

II

Education, employment and empowerment

Essentially, Pai claims that: (*a*) there has been an increase in the education of SCs; (*b*) that this increase in education has provided them with new employment opportunities; (*c*) that these new employment opportunities have reduced SCs' dependence on formerly dominant castes; and (*d*) that SCs' increase in education has increased their social awareness. All four claims are unproven.

Has there been an increase in the education of SCs?

The paper provides hardly any evidence about changes in educational qualifications. A table of educational achievements by age of respondent indicates that the young have more schooling than the middle-aged. Given the general evidence of rising levels of schooling in UP over the past fifty years, this is not a surprising finding (though in our experience

the schooling of older respondents is often understated, and the more educated middle-aged are more likely to be non-resident). Pai presents no evidence that SC schooling experiences are changing faster than those of other castes. Of her respondents, SCs are considerably less likely to have higher secondary schooling, or above, than are the land-holding castes. Table 1 (p. 202) shows that 31 (35 per cent) of the 89 SC respondents have had at least 9 years of schooling, 23 (32 per cent) of the 72 MBC respondents, and 22 (49 per cent) of the 45 Rajputs, Jats and Gujars.

But these gross comparisons are vitiated by a lack of evidence about the age distributions of the different caste groupings.[2] We are told that Pai's sample households were purposively selected to be representative of the major castes living in each village, and within each household a further selection was made to ensure that the respondents came from different age groups. (We are not told, but we have assumed, that all the respondents were male.) It seems, however, that Pai's selection of respondents by age was not done very systematically. The age distributions are radically different in the four villages (and possibly, therefore, also in the different castes, though we are not given the sample distribution by age and caste). For example, in Maithena, 12 (22 per cent) of the 55 sample respondents are in the age category 18–25, but in Uldiypur, only 3 (7 per cent) of the 45 respondents are in this age category.

A more fundamental set of problems relates to Pai's equation of 'education' with schooling. She ignores not only non-school education but, more importantly, differences in the 'quality' of schools and the qualifications they provide. Indeed, the research she cites (Singh 1998) clearly demonstrates the poor quality not only of most government schools (see also Drèze and Gazdar 1998) but also of the unrecognised and unaided schools established for SCs in rural Meerut district.[3]

[2] Pai also does not report census statistics accurately and appropriately. She claims (p. 201) that the literacy figures for her sample 'compare favourably with those for Meerut district where the literacy level is 30.01 per cent in the rural areas, which itself is higher than the state average of 26.85 per cent.' But the actual 1991 census figure for rural Meerut (literates aged 7+ as per cent of the total population aged 7+) is 46.44 per cent; that for UP is 36.66 per cent. If Pai's respondents are male, however, the appropriate comparison should perhaps anyway be with the male figures of 62.02 per cent in Meerut and 52.05 per cent in UP (*Census of India* 1993: 295, 297). The 70 per cent figure in 1997 for her sample (given the doubts about its age distribution) no longer looks particularly impressive. In a later paper (Pai 2001: 649) Pai takes the literacy rates for the total population in Meerut and Azamgarh and attributes them to the SCs in those districts (*Census of India* 1993: 297, 306).

[3] Jeffrey (1999: Chapter 7) also notes that some unrecognised and unaided Meerut schools are locally seen to provide 'fake' (*naqli*) qualifications.

Has increased schooling led to new employment opportunities?

The paper's occupational data are both confusing and implausible. First the confusions: Table 3 purports to show the 'occupational structure of respondents' households'. Summing the four villages, these show 70 farmers, 82 labourers, 24 in service, 17 in business and 15 students, with 2 therefore 'missing'. But since 'households' do not have a (singular) occupation, presumably this table should be entitled 'occupation of respondents'. This presumption is enhanced by the separate statement (p. 204) that 'about 151 persons from the 210 sample households—mainly Jatavs and MBCs—have members in service, the large majority of whom commute to Meerut city daily'. Obviously, this statement would have more meaning if we knew how many adults were regarded as being in these households.[4] It is also hardly surprising that those who commute and migrate are 'mainly Jatavs and MBCs' since (according to her Tables 1 and 2) 72 (34 per cent) of the 210 sample households are MBCs and 89 (42 per cent) are SCs, mostly Jatavs.[5]

The implausibility of the data derives from the claim that 151 persons from the sample households are 'in service' (p. 204). In local parlance, 'service' means a permanent, white-collar, normally government job.[6] It is highly unlikely that so many villagers would have this form of employment. The claim can only be made meaningful if we assume that the figure of 151 refers to all forms of employment, not only government employment of different grades (from peons to Class 1 officers) but also including temporary, unskilled labour in the informal sector.

The rise in off-farm employment opportunities in western UP has been noted before (see, e.g., Lieten and Srivastava 1999; Sharma and

[4] Household definition is a thorny issue: respondents often include sons or brothers who have migrated further away, for example, on the grounds that they retain land-holdings or house-plots in the village. In our own censuses in Bijnor we have asked about such men and included them as non-residents.

[5] Pai's tables are not internally consistent. Table 3 shows 208 respondents (not the 210 shown in Tables 1 and 2). Table 4 has only 179. The note to Table 4 says that 'information on one household in Maithena and one in Uldiypur was unavailable', but all 10 Gujars in Dedhwa are missing, quite apart from a total of 14 MBCs and 5 SCs. On the other hand, whereas there are 3 Brahman and 1 Bania households in Table 1, there are 4 Brahman and 2 Bania households in Table 4! Discrepancies also arise between Tables 1 and 2: the figures for Dedhwa village show different numbers of illiterates (23 in Table 1, 20 in Table 2) and those up to Class VIII (20 in Table 1, 23 in Table 2).

[6] An alternative, the economists' use of 'service sector' (not agriculture or industry), seems unlikely to be the meaning in this context.

Poleman 1993).[7] Pai does not show, however, that these off-farm opportunities are being obtained more regularly (or even as often) by the formerly dominated castes than by those she says are the formerly dominant. She does not say how many men were dependent on land for their income at any point in the past, nor (indeed) do we receive a clear picture of men's occupations in the four villages in 1997.

Pai gives a general description of occupations by caste on pages 204 and 206. This certainly supports her claim that the SCs are not entirely dependent on farm labour within the villages. She also mentions a 'class of businessmen and contractors' that has emerged among the Jatavs (p. 204). But in general, the account suffers from a lack of detail. We do not know the numbers involved relative to the past or relative to other castes. Nor do we have enough information about the meanings of these various occupational positions. Pai's sample villages have had a majority or near-majority of SCs for some time, and the villages are all linked by good roads to a nearby city, Meerut. In these circumstances, out-migration or dependence on off-farm employment is likely to have been a long-standing affair. What has really changed since, say, the late 1980s? Even without some base-line data for this period, surrogate indicators of change could be created from the employment histories of successive cohorts of men; but if Pai has done this, she has not presented the results in her paper.

Even more problematically, we are given no reason to believe that there is 'an erosion of the earlier link between caste and occupation, which is marked among the MBCs and particularly the dalits, specially in families which traditionally held little land and have taken advantage of the expanding educational facilities in the village' (p. 206). Pai provides data neither on any statistical correlation between schooling and occupational outcomes, nor on occupational trajectories and the role of schooling for individual men.[8] We accept that having some schooling helps men in their search for off-farm employment; but such schooling may not be the key to improved employment opportunities. In general, schooling is a necessary but not a sufficient basis for acquiring secure or well-paid employment, and may be less important than other factors

[7] Several accounts suggest that off-farm employment is no longer growing as fast as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. If dominance relationships were changing largely because of the growth of off-farm employment, it would be unwise to predict that this will continue at the same rate in future.

[8] Here Pai repeats a common weakness of much literature on schooling and its effects: the unexamined presumption that schooling is a 'good thing', whether for female autonomy, employment, or the creation of social awareness. These *may* result from schooling, but such assertions need to be demonstrated, not merely claimed.

(Breman 1985; Parry 2000; Wade 1985). Our own research in western UP (see, e.g., Jeffrey 2000) suggests that access to lucrative off-farm jobs depends upon a household's access to money (for bribes or start-up capital), social contacts and information. In such efforts, those with existing resources (in the form of economic, social and cultural capital) have major advantages over newcomers.

Do SCs' new employment opportunities reduce dependence?

Pai does not establish links between occupation and wealth or income. We are not given wealth data. The income data are questionable, because of well-known problems of reliability in collecting information on income from households where incomes are seasonal, irregular, sometimes completely in kind and often not entirely in cash. If Pai's income figures can be trusted, they do suggest considerable levels of inequality of incomes by caste: but again, we have no trend data. Furthermore, without some evidence of income and wealth, we do not know, for example, whether the fifty-six shops established with government loans in the four villages are making a profit, or are seen as a means of passing time for men unable or unwilling to perform farm labour. Shops are notoriously transitory sources of income, and only relatively few have long-term stability. Moreover, they may be heavily dependent on the patronage of the landowners, or they may flourish through meeting demands generated solely within the SC population: without knowing which is the case here, we cannot be sure that being a shop-owner is a route out of dependency relationships.

Pai notes in passing that some non-educated men are working as labourers elsewhere (p. 198). But as Lieten and Srivastava (1999: 166–74) show, much labour migration or off-farm commuting for employment involves working conditions and wage rates little better than those on local farms. The alternative employers may be either from the same dominant castes as the local landowners, or in close supportive relationships with them. Even if we accept that SCs are paid more, have more employment security or more days' work per year than when they were mainly employed locally in agriculture, Pai does not say how relative independence at work translates into a decline in other areas of former dependence. Such dependence has often included the needs of the landless for fodder for their animals, for access to the fields to defecate, and for informal loans without land as security (see Singh 1992). Just because labourers are migrating to towns, we cannot conclude that they are able to avoid all village-level dominance relationships. Indeed, if many men are migrating or commuting, this may increase Chamar

vulnerability within the village, for example to sexual harassment of Chamar women (see the quote at the beginning of our paper).

Has increased schooling also increased the social awareness of SCs?

The role of education in increasing social awareness is asserted at several points in Pai's article. Most importantly, 'with the decline of landed power, education has become the major catalyst for change in economic and social status in our sample villages' (p. 199). If we assume, for the moment, that the SCs are getting substantially more schooling than before, and that their schooling is leading to better employment, on what grounds might we accept that schooling is a catalyst for other forms of social change for SCs? One obvious problem is that Pai provides no indicators of 'social awareness', and we do not know how she defines this term. Second, we are not told how she knows that social awareness has changed through time. Third, we do not know if any such change in social awareness can be laid at the door of schooling (rather than, for example, the mass media, or political education).

The critical sociology of schooling suggests (for example) that schools function through introducing bodily discipline and systems of punishment, and legitimise 'failure' by 'cooling out' those who do not pass examinations. It is thus at least as plausible that schooling reinforces rather than undermines social inequalities based on caste, class and gender, as well as possibly *reducing* social awareness, under some definitions of that term. That is, we must look not only at those who succeed at school, but also at those who fail or never attend, before we can say how schooling affects attitudes and actions.

III
Panchāyats *and dominance*

Pai's argument that dominance is declining also rests on her belief in the capacity of SCs *as a group* to wrest control over *panchāyats*, and the resources they distribute, from 'formerly' dominant castes. Her argument is as follows: (*a*) lower castes now dominate *panchāyats*, independently of the favour of formerly dominant castes; (*b*) the funds under *panchāyat* control are significant political (not just economic) resources; and (*c*) as a result of BSP mobilisation, the SC leadership uses this dominance to advance the interests of SCs (or, at least, of Jatavs/Chamars) as a whole.

Do lower castes dominate *panchāyats*?

Pai claims that the BSP, reservations and politicisation have enabled 'Jatavs in our sample villages to gain control over the *panchāyats* and particularly the patronage that this provides' (p. 209). Control over local councils is not simply a matter of the caste composition of the elected members. What counts is the *panchāyat*'s mode of functioning. Within a *panchāyat* it is perfectly possible for the SC members to be forced to play roles that do not threaten the positions of the landed classes, even when they are in the majority. We hear nothing in Pai's paper about the direct or indirect influences that landed groups can bring to bear on *panchāyat* members, ranging from outright physical violence to subtler forms of control. Since dominance is a relationship, it is surprising to be told so little about changes among the landowning caste groups, especially in their strategies for dealing with challenges to their position.

In a more recent paper on her research in three of these four villages, Pai does present some evidence on the extent to which dominant castes are still involved in the selection of candidates for *pradhān*. She notes that 'some of our respondents held that these candidates were also approved and supported by the jats and therefore their election was the result of a tacit agreement between the powerful jat families and the forward and prosperous dalit families' (Pai 2001: 649). In neither article, however, has Pai shown that SCs have been able to use their numerical preponderance over the *panchāyats* to implement policies that support SCs (or Jatavs/Chamars) as a whole, rather than those that facilitate the growth of an elite class within them. Nor is it clear how *pradhāns* undermine the position of landowning groups in these villages.

How significant are the resources under *panchāyat* control?

Furthermore, while we agree that it is important to look at the local state and not to read off power from an analysis of political parties or other changes at the level of New Delhi or Lucknow, neither must we forget the wider context. Control over the *panchāyat* may not mean much in terms of local power conflicts. Indeed, despite the attempts to decentralise functions to the *panchāyat* level, discretion remains mostly in the hands of local bureaucrats, be they in education, health, land consolidation or agrarian extension. Nonetheless, the local state can be important in dominance relationships.

Pai focuses on the role of the state as a provider of welfare resources. She presents data on the government development scheme expenditures

in the four villages from 1990–91 until 1996–97. These welfare resources are undoubtedly important and may significantly improve the economic and social position of recipient households. But these resources are, in practice, very restricted, for example, in comparison with the financial benefits accruing to landed castes from the subsidies on the purchase price for sugarcane. In addition, our research in Bijnor and Meerut districts suggests that the numbers of subsidised loans, housing grants and pensions, and days of employment under government schemes such as the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) are also severely limited, relative to the demand. Any individual family can only hope for one house grant, a few days of labour, and one subsidised loan: none of these—separately or together—offers any real degree of financial security. Furthermore, the *pradhān* (central to Pai's account) is only one person in a chain of people (rarely SC or MBC) who control access to these resources—people like the Block Development Officer, the *patwārī*, and the local bank staff. Successfully obtaining public funds requires influence, contacts, and a willingness to bribe (or to forgo some of the benefits, which amounts to the same thing).[9] The figures presented by Pai thus exaggerate the benefits of these schemes (by not acknowledging the leakages, which usually reduce the cash benefits by 25 per cent or more) and provide no insights into the subservient behaviour often needed before the grants and loans are finally sanctioned. The significance of these schemes for intra-village relationships remains unclear.

Pai focuses on the welfare roles of the state, and thus exaggerates the transformation that may have taken place because she ignores other ways in which people relate to the state (Jeffrey and Lerche 2000). Drawing on intensive field research in three villages in Meerut district, Jeffrey (1999, 2000, 2001) identified caste- and class-based inequalities in access to the police, judiciary and state institutions responsible for marketing sugarcane. In these villages, Chamars maintained that they routinely experienced discrimination in state offices, along the lines of class and/or caste. Describing repeated failed attempts to persuade state officials to help him, one Chamar man noted that when members of his *jāti* go to offices 'we can stand around and look strong but it makes no difference' (Jeffrey 2001). Close attention to the everyday practices of rural people suggests that caste continues to be an important idiom for

[9] There is, of course, a substantial literature on the weakness of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) as a means of addressing rural poverty, noting not only the 'leakages' we mention but also the vulnerability of those who have taken loans: buffaloes die, rickshaws break down, labourers fall sick, loans are used for consumption, etc.

the expression of class differences in western UP (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Jeffrey 2000, 2001; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Lerche 1995; Lieten 1996). Poor Chamars are therefore doubly disadvantaged in their encounters with (usually upper caste Hindu) officials. Even during Mayawati's tenure as UP chief minister, Chamars said they were afraid of naming Jats in reports made to the police and were sceptical of their chances of obtaining fair decisions through the judiciary (Jeffrey 2000: 1032). In contrast, some richer Jats boasted of their control over the local police force and judiciary and their ability to commit crimes without fear of punishment. Jats and Chamars mentioned many crimes perpetrated by Jats against Chamars, including murder, verbal and physical intimidation, rape, sexual harassment, torture, theft, arson and vandalism (ibid.). This, of course, echoes a much wider literature on state blindness towards or connivance in violence targeted at SCs in India.[10] The police and the judiciary are key organs of the state in much of Western UP; because Pai does not consider their significance, she cannot persuade us that dominance relationships are changing as far and as fast as she claims.

How far does BSP ideology affect the functioning of *panchāyats*?

The final element in Pai's causal account is the role of the BSP. Despite its failure to win elections in Meerut (or indeed in much of western UP), Pai claims that the BSP has a widespread impact because of its 'social movement' characteristics. These are its teachings using Dr. Ambedkar's life-story and writings, and the use of symbols (such as statues of Dr. Ambedkar) to make claims over public spaces. As a result, she says, the BSP 'has mobilised the Jatavs emphasising separate identity and self-respect' (p. 218). Pai suggests that its electoral strategies (linking with the BJP or with Congress) are likely to be less successful than further stress on these mobilisations, which would also bring electoral success.

There are two main problems with this account. First, Pai presents very little evidence for the social movement that she claims is so significant. By contrast, she does hint that some BSP policies are divisive, and that factional conflict remains among the Jatavs. One example is the rival 'Ambedkar Schools' established in Khanauda and Maithena (p. 200). Another example concerns the intra-Dalit splits that allowed the BJP to win in the Hastinapur assembly constituency in 1994 (p. 215).

[10] See Corbridge and Harriss (2000: 203) for a summary of some of the recent literature on this subject.

In general, Pai does not directly address the central problem of whether or not Jatav unity is being maintained as class differences within the caste group are increasing. Second, Pai's account makes clear that the more the BSP stresses its role as the source of self-respect and identity for the Jatavs, the more difficult it is for them to get support from other SCs, let alone from MBCs or Muslims, both of whom are crucial to any election-winning alliance in western UP (see also Duncan 1999).[11]

IV
Problems of typicality or prototypicality

The problems we have outlined in Sections II and III make us sceptical of Pai's claims. But if she were correct, what would be the wider significance of her claims? The problems here derive largely from the sample village selection procedures. Pai never elaborates the academic justification for the selection of these four sample villages, though she describes their characteristics (large, well-connected villages with SC majorities). Two main plausible reasons why these villages might have been selected come to mind: because they are *typical* of villages in western UP; or because they are *prototypical.*

Although Pai presents no evidence of typicality, many of her arguments are presented *as if* these villages are typical and can be a basis for generalisation.[12] Manifestly this is not the case, since Pai also points out that Meerut is one of the most economically 'advanced' districts in western UP, and that these villages are unusual even within Meerut for their size, concentrations of SC population, and accessibility to Meerut town. We must therefore presume that Pai thinks that her material displays *prototypicality*, in two forms. First, that these villages show the future for other villages in Meerut; and second, that other districts will follow the experience of Meerut.

We are not provided with any grounds for accepting either part of the prototypicality argument. Patterns of agricultural, industrial and

[11] In the Upper Doab districts between Saharanpur and Firozabad, SCs made up 22 per cent and Muslims 24 per cent of the population in 1991 (*Census of India* 1996: 172–80) In the remaining districts in western UP, SCs constituted only 17 per cent of the total population, while Muslims contributed 27 per cent. Neither census category, of course, votes en bloc.

[12] For example, in describing the caste groups in the sample villages, she says they are 'generally representative of the district' (p. 194). But 23 per cent of the rural district population is Muslim, which raises serious questions about the 'representativeness' of villages where Muslims seem to be insignificant.

infrastructural growth vary widely across western UP, particularly between districts in the Upper Doab (between the Jumna and the Ganges) and the rest. Furthermore, we cannot assume that small and relatively isolated villages will come to resemble larger villages in the future. This notion rests on a modernisation hypothesis, that as roads, power supply and other facilities spread, so the social characteristics of villages will also change. In a classic paper, Biplab Dasgupta showed that small and large villages often have very different caste structures, patterns of land-holding and occupational distributions, and move along different trajectories (Dasgupta 1975). It seems unlikely that SCs in small villages, away from main roads, or where they do not form a majority of the village population, will be able to 'progress' in the manner of SCs in larger, better-connected villages. They may do so by migrating to towns or to villages where they are a majority.[13] But most SCs are likely to remain in villages radically different from the four described by Pai. To assess how these villages might change requires a different research strategy. Somewhat surprisingly, Pai does not cite any of the other studies of dominance relationships in western UP.[14] These provide rather different pictures of the nature and speed of transformation. Pai's failure to refer to this material reinforces our sense that her sample villages are atypical and provide poor indicators of likely patterns of change more generally.

V

Alternative perspectives: The case of Bijnor

In this section we shall sketch a rather different account of social change in rural Bijnor. This is a preliminary statement, possibly subject to some revision because our research is still in progress. In order to keep the account simple, we shall focus on changes to the male population in one village, Nangal Jat, 16 km from Bijnor town.[15] We shall use our own

[13] At least in Bijnor district, both of these forms of migration may be happening, though not on a large scale.

[14] Here we have in mind the work of Gupta (1998), Lerche (1995), Lieten and Srivastava (1999) as well as Jeffrey (1999).

[15] More details on the village can be found in Jeffery and Jeffery (1997: 65–67). For reasons of space we are not considering changes in the educational and occupational positions of the female population, though these are central to our wider on-going research. In addition to household census data (collected by RJ in 1990 and by RJ, CJ and two local female research assistants in 2001), all three of us have conducted interviews and group discussions with Chamar villagers. These discussions have been facilitated by local female research

census results from 1990 and 2001, and discussions held with Chamar men and women in 2001. Like Pai, we selected a large, multi-caste village in which the SCs (predominantly Chamars/Jatavs) form the largest category. Nangal's population of 4,160 in 1990 was 45 per cent SC, 28 per cent Jat and 19 per cent MBC. In 2001, the SC share of the total population of 5,300 had increased to 50 per cent (Chamars/Jatavs being 48 per cent), while the Jat and MBC shares had dropped slightly, to 26 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. Other caste groups include Brahmans, Rajputs and Sheikhs. Land-holding is concentrated amongst the Jats, who own about 82 per cent of the land, compared to only about 8 per cent owned by the Chamars.

Recent changes in education and occupation are complex and not easily summarised. For schooling, data on registration gives an exaggerated picture, since dropout rates remain high. Our Tables 1 and 2 suggest that between 1990 and 2001 there was a considerable growth in school registration for boys from all caste groups in Nangal. Nonetheless, Jat schooling achievements remain well above those of Chamars and others. They make more use of non-state schooling, are more likely to start schooling around the age of 5 rather than later, and are therefore much less likely still to be in primary school at the age of 10 or above.

Occupational changes affect different generations differently. Men aged 15–24 commonly move around, not only changing occupation seasonally but also trying out different jobs for short periods. One Chamar man, for example, opened a *pān* and *bīrī* stall in Bijnor town when he was in his late teens. When that made a loss, he worked in a liquor store in Nangal, then opened a tea-stall in another town. When the landlord raised the rent he left that job and spent six years making shoes. In 2001 (aged 33) he is a part-time sub-contractor for government contracts. Our census results, therefore, provide a very simplified snapshot of occupational decisions, particularly for men in the younger age categories. Nonetheless, one would expect changes in occupational structure to show up most in the activities of younger men, most of whom will have become reasonably stably established in an occupational category by the age of 25. For this reason we have chosen here to focus on 25–34-year-old men. For ease of comparison we consider changes between 1990 and 2001 in the positions of Chamars and Jats, leaving the other castes out of the discussion; and we use Pai's

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assistants, who sometimes take notes at the time but always write detailed reports in Hindi within 24 hours. These reports are then translated by us, and additional material added where necessary. Quotations appearing later in this paper are derived from these fieldnotes.

Table 1
Schooling Status of 5–9-Year-Old Boys, Nangal Jat, 1990 and 2001 (%)

	1990			*2001*		
	Chamars	*Jats*	*Others*	*Chamars*	*Jats*	*Others*
Government primary schools	}34	}89	}47	35	19	39
Non-state primary schools				33	76	24
Madrasās	0	0	9	0	0	14
Not in school	66	11	45	32	5	24
N	**128**	**63**	**92**	**206**	**78**	**101**

Source: All tables are based on village censuses conducted by the authors in September–October 1990 and February 2001. Totals do not all add to 100% because of rounding off.

Table 2
Schooling Status of 10–14-Year-Old Boys, Nangal Jat, 1990 and 2001 (%)

	1990			*2001*		
	Chamars	*Jats*	*Others*	*Chamars*	*Jats*	*Others*
Government primary schools	}27	}23	}24	28	6	30
Non-state primary schools				24	11	10
Madrasās	0	0	13	0	0	10
Government secondary schools	}25	}63	}20	0	6	2
Non-state secondary schools				26	76	31
Not in school	48	13	43	21	1	16
N	**123**	**82**	**76**	**190**	**72**	**96**

occupational categories. Jat men in this age group in Nangal have much higher schooling qualifications than Chamar men, but the differences are declining. Tables 3 and 4 show that in 1990 only 20 per cent of Chamars had more than eight years of schooling, compared to 60 per cent of Jats. By 2001 the proportion of Chamars with more than eight years of schooling had risen to 31 per cent, but the Jat percentage had hardly changed, at 61 per cent. But the Chamar men had been largely unable to turn their higher schooling into rewarding employment. Jat men remain better able to acquire more lucrative, less insecure jobs than Chamar men.

The proportions of Chamar men in labouring jobs in Nangal or elsewhere within Bijnor district have not changed over the ten-year period, at nearly 90 per cent of those with up to eight years of schooling, and 50 per cent of those with more than eight years of schooling. As in

Table 3
Occupations of 25–34-Year-Old Chamar and Jat Males by Schooling, Nangal, 1990 (%)

Occupational Types	*Up to 8 Years of Schooling*		*More than 8 Years of Schooling*		*All Schooling*	
	Chamars	*Jats*	*Chamars*	*Jats*	*Chamars*	*Jats*
Self-employed farming	1	85	8	66	3	74
Labour						
In Nangal or elsewhere in Bijnor	88	7.5	50	0	80	3
Migration beyond the district	2	2.5	0	5	2	4
Business or semi-skilled	9	2.5	13	16	10	11
Service	0	0	29	7	6	4
Student, unemployed or other	0	2.5	0	7	0	5
N	98	40	24	61	122	101

Table 4
Occupations of 25–34-Year-Old Chamar and Jat Males by Schooling, Nangal, 2001 (%)

Occupational Types	*Up to 8 Years of Schooling*		*More than 8 Years of Schooling*		*All Schooling*	
	Chamars	*Jats*	*Chamars*	*Jats*	*Chamars*	*Jats*
Self-employed farming	1	67	3	57	2	61
Labour						
In Nangal or elsewhere in Bijnor	89	16	49	3	78	8
Migration beyond the district	3	8	7	2	4	4
Business or semi-skilled	5	8	18	17	9	13
Service	2	0	9	16	3	10
Student, unemployed, other	1	1	14	6	5	4
N	149	67	57	106	216	173

Meerut, many of these labourers would prefer to work outside the village. They talked about the poor wage rates paid by Jat farmers within the village, and of delays in being paid. Many Jat farmers continue to display their dominance by making labourers return several times, or by asking them to do various additional menial tasks before they are paid. But the options are limited, and many Chamar men work in nearby brick-kilns or at sugar factories owned and managed by local Jat landowners. The return bus fare to Bijnor town is approximately equal to the difference in wage rates between Nangal and Bijnor, so few labourers look to the town for work. For certain tasks—like the wheat

and rice harvest, rice transplantation, or the cutting of cane—Chamar households (men, women and children together) may enter into piece-rate contracts, which they prefer to a daily wage. But they still remain to a considerable extent dependent on the local landowners for their subsistence.

Chamars who are not labourers are most likely to be engaged in some kind of small business (running a tea-stall, working as a tailor or a barber, for example), or are still students, or (what may be basically the same thing) report themselves as unemployed. By 1990 there were several Chamar men in 'service-type' jobs (few of which were actually of the order of permanent government employment), but few more gained such employment in the 1990s: the growth in 'service-type' employment has been mostly among the Jats. Unlike the cases described by Pai, in Nangal it is the Jats who have been better at moving out of agriculture (the overall percentage in self-employed farming has dropped from 74 per cent in 1990 to 61 per cent in 2001). Nonetheless, some Chamars have managed to obtain service employment, and they may have contributed to the emergence of what Gramsci (1999: 5ff) has called 'organic intellectuals', who serve as relatively effective and cheap sources of assistance in poorer Chamars' attempts to obtain benefits from the state. Between 1991 and 2000, three men acquired jobs, one as a teacher and two in Class 3 jobs in the police service. But some poor Chamars still see the barriers to secure employment as insuperable:

> N4421: A labourer on Rs. 50 per day can educate his son. But where can he get Rs. 50–60,000 for a job? Where can a labourer get money for bribes? In Nangal, Munesh has got service. It's two years now since he got his service. And Pavan is in training to be a teacher, his father [also a teacher] has got service. They've got service because their fathers had service before them.

To summarise, then, these data give very limited support for claims that schooling has transformed occupational structures, or that a rapid growth in remunerative off-farm employment has made a dramatic difference to Chamar dependence on Jat landowners. The changes are modest and slow, and the dominant castes are better able to take advantage of them.

Some Chamars blame their lack of unity (*ekta*) for their failure to turn their numerical dominance (48 per cent of the total population in 2001) into political success. Nangal has only had a Chamar *pradhān* when the

post was reserved (for an SC woman) between 1995 and 2000.[16] Her husband's view, borne out in interviews with others, was that the *pradhān* was merely one among many brokers (*dallāls*) who operated, for payment, as intermediaries between villagers and the organs of the local state.[17] His wife was not re-elected in the 2000 elections, in part because many Chamars thought that her husband had enriched himself and a small group of his kin and other supporters, and had not brought benefits to large numbers of Chamars living in other parts of the village. (As a result of his earnings while his wife was *pradhānī*, he now owns a flour mill and ice-cream factory.)

Although Nangal was an Ambedkar village when Mayavati was in power, the *pradhānī*'s husband said there was little impact on Nangal:

> N6131: The meaning is that all programmes and conveniences [like light, water, school and connection to a pukka road] have been done for this village. How could all this be done in one year? The *pradhān* can't do it in the five years for which he is there, so how can he do it in one year? I managed to complete 50–60 houses in five years. There are a total of 200 *sarkārī* [government] houses in the village but we need about 600. So those who have are happy and those who don't are angry.

Certainly, the Chamars have been unable to make decisive progress in collective endeavours. The most obvious example is the Ambedkar Junior High School, established in Nangal in 1978. Despite considerable efforts, the management committee has failed to receive any government assistance for the school. They claim to be the only Ambedkar Junior High School in Bijnor district. Mayavati was elected to the Lok Sabha from Bijnor in the 1980s, but even so she has never given any help to the Nangal Ambedkar School. The school committee sent a delegation to Lucknow when Mayavati was chief minister to ask her for some assistance, but they had to return empty-handed because they arrived there on the day that her government fell. The school has hardly grown in the last ten years, and Chamar children are about equally likely to attend the other, Jat-run, Junior High School in the village.

[16] The *pradhānī* occasionally attended meetings where her signature was required; otherwise, her husband took all the major decisions. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of gender relationships among the Chamars, but clearly Pai's is a 'gender-blind' vision of the democracy emerging in western UP.

[17] This view echoes the perspective of Gupta (1998), but we do not share his interpretation that this leads to increased interdependency of the poor and the rich

Chamars in Nangal, then, remain economically insecure and politically weak. Nonetheless, they do claim some benefits from the success of the BSP at the state level, and there are small signs of change in their relationships with the Jats and members of other dominant castes in the district. Many Chamars stressed that as a result of Mayavati's electoral success, they have gained self-confidence (*hosla*) and courage (*himmat*):

> Manjula: What about confidence, did you get that in Mayavati's time?
> N4421: That's the most important thing!
> N4461: Everyone got benefit from Mayavati. Our courage particularly also grew just at that time [*himmat hī to barh gayi tabhī se hamārī*]. She felt proud that she was a Chamar.

But later in the same discussion one Chamar man voiced a strong version of the problems still facing the Chamars:

> N4221: The Jats have a lot of unity, and the most important thing is that they have strength [*tāqat*]. They can do work that costs money. They can give money to make trouble in the counting of votes. The Jats have money. With money they can get anyone beaten up. Last time we had a Chamar *pradhān*, because it was a 'reserved seat'. Otherwise there's no price at which we could get a Chamar *pradhān*. How can a Chamar be the equal of them? Chamars get work for ten days and then no work for twenty days, so how can they survive?

The Jats used to bribe the lower cadres of the police onto their side in cases of intra-village disputes; now the Chamars also have some routes to higher-level policemen, and are sometimes able to reduce the extent to which the police ignore the Chamar point of view. A politically active Chamar man with schooling up to Class X is a *mochī* (cobbler) in the Reserve Police Lines in Bijnor town. This position brings him into daily personal contact with the senior policemen in the town, and he is sometimes able to use this influence when villagers get into trouble with the police. Nonetheless, we heard many accounts of routine harassment of Chamars, whether sexual harassment limiting Chamar girls' access to schooling, delays in payment of wages for agricultural work, or the use of debt relationships to make Chamars provide additional services to Jat farmers. But Jat interests are increasingly located outside the village. They use their growing wealth to invest in further education, off-farm enterprises and government employment. In order to understand the changing patterns of dominance within rural Bijnor we must also take account of changes

in urban Bijnor and further afield, and the nature of relationships between towns and the countryside.[18]

VI
Conclusion

Social change is occurring in Bijnor villages, and in some cases has led to changes in the forms of domination. But we do not see Pai's 'transition ... to a more democratic system in which the lower castes/classes are able to assert themselves' (p. 216). We suggest that she has been able to reach this conclusion only by an uncritical acceptance of the rhetoric of change provided by activist SCs from highly unusual villages in an atypical district. Neither of her key arguments—relating increased social awareness to schooling and its effects on employment, and relating constitutional and other changes in *panchāyats* to the creation of a social movement led by the BSP—is adequately supported by the data she presents. Our own data from Bijnor suggest that more circumspection is in order.

In Bijnor, the related concepts of dominance and resistance are not a particularly useful way to understand what is going on. Chamars and Jats alike are embracing existing routes to individual mobility, rather than attempting to transform political and social structures. In general, there seems to be an increasing significance of class, and only small changes in the relationships between caste and class. In Nangal, Jats are able to use their stronger links to urban areas, and their access to the local and state-level government bodies, to achieve better educational and employment outcomes. They remain major employers of Chamar labour, they are major sources of informal credit on exploitative terms, and they continue to indulge in sexual harassment of Chamar women. Attempts by SCs, especially Chamars acting with reference to Ambedkarite ideology, have managed to limit the worst excesses of these dominance relationships. But these attempts are vitiated by divisions among the SCs. The non-Chamars resent the Chamar ability to monopolise most of the benefits (as Pai shows). In addition, preferential development programmes tend to increase resentment and jealousy among those Chamars excluded from the limited benefits these schemes have to offer. They can see how a small group has monopolised many of

[18] Questions like this will be addressed in the next stage of our research, so we are not yet able to say very much about urban–rural relationships.

the rewards by acting as *dallāls* or through getting employment, an their political activities (such as voting in *panchāyat* elections) ar divided and weak.

In the context of structural adjustment policies, in which the stat seems more likely to withdraw from major social developmental effort in the villages than to reinforce them, we do not see a simple long-terr trend of increasing SC assurance and the submission of dominant caste to more equal relationships. Rather, the future seems likely to involv continuing struggle, further setbacks, and continuing frustration of th economic, social and political ambitions of the poor. We are unhapp with any analysis (such as Pai's) that seems to suggest that this struggl is nearly over, and which might thereby encourage complacency.

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ALSO FROM SAGE

TELEVISION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN RURAL INDIA

Kirk Johnson

For the approximately 74 per cent of India's one billion people who live in villages, television has been the one material commodity that has most dramatically influenced their social lives. However, although the influence of TV as a powerful medium of communication is well recognized, there are very few studies on the impact of TV on Indian society and culture, let alone on rural society.

Kirk Johnson's study explores the social environment of village life and the role TV plays in the ever-changing landscape of rural India. It delves into the lives of villagers and their evolving relationship with TV, as also its role in the dynamics of social change. Focusing on real people's lives and voices, the author uses participant observation methods and in-depth interviews to address various pertinent questions, including the role of TV in social change, its influence on gender, caste and family relations, and its impact on the aspirations, attitudes, expectations and concerns of the villagers.

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The encounter of sociology and women's studies: Questions from the borders

Mary E. John

Sociology has undeniably been one of the most reflexive disciplines among the social sciences and humanities in contemporary India. There is ample and wide-ranging evidence of disciplinary introspection, and even a brief (but far from complete) list is impressive: the long-standing 'for a sociology of India' series inaugurated in this very journal; volumes such as those by T.K. Oommen and Partha Mukherji (1988), and D.N. Dhanagare (1993); Veena Das's discussion of the crisis of the discipline (Das 1993b) and the responses it inspired; a seminar on the 'recasting of Indian sociology' held in 1997, and a subsequent one on the history of the discipline organised in

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2000.[1] Sociologists have, moreover, drawn attention to issues of gender, feminism and women's studies on a number of occasions, and in ways not witnessed elsewhere. The questions raised have been lively, and sometimes controversial, originating from a range of positions both marginal and central to the discipline (Béteille 1995; Chaudhuri 1982; Gupta 1995; Rege 1997, 2000; Uberoi 1989).

Unlike all these interlocutors, my own interdisciplinary background has invariably placed me somewhere 'outside' the everyday structures of departments in a way that I could never have envisaged. My training has included the fields of economics, philosophy, anthropology, feminist theory and women's studies. Having turned to the subject matter of Indian sociology in recent years, I feel not unlike the anthropologist of old, a participant-observer with conflicting experiences of identification and unfamiliarity.

My specific interests in the field of sociology—and the questions I am going to raise in this article—derive from a project on the formation of women's studies in post-independence India. They have been directly shaped by my institutional location from 1997 to 2001 within an 'autonomous' research centre (set up in 1980 under the umbrella of the Indian Council of Social Science Research to promote studies on women) rather than by the somewhat differently oriented structures and demands of life in a sociology department. Though the term 'women's studies' may seem familiar enough, it turns out that we have only the haziest of conceptions about this domain, its tasks, its boundaries, breakthroughs and limitations. When references are made to 'women's studies', it is often not even clear whether we are talking about a 'subject' with its own curriculum, about a field of scholarship, or about outreach and advocacy on women's issues.

To make things even more complicated, the majority of those who have been engaging in research on women and gender have not explicitly done so under the rubric of 'women's studies'. While the women's movement in India has had its share of chroniclers, historians and critics since the early 1990s, no equivalent investigations exist where research

[1] The seminar 'Recasting Indian sociology: The changing contours of the discipline' was organised at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 20–21 March 1997, and the papers, edited by Maitrayee Chaudhuri, are to be published by Orient Longman. The seminar 'Knowledge, institutions, practices: The formation of Indian sociology and anthropology' was organised at the Institute of Economic Growth, 19–21 April 2000. For a report of the seminar see Sundar et al. (2000) and the special issue of *Seminar*, 'Situating sociology' (No. 495, 2000).

on women is concerned, some pioneering efforts notwithstanding (Desai and Krishnaraj 1987; Desai and Patel 1989). Women's studies in India now encompasses an entire generation of scholarship on women, gender and feminism. This research is dispersed across a range of issues, and has drawn upon resources from existing disciplines. It first developed in the 1970s in response to multiple pressures, as much from 'above' as from 'below'. Local, national and international influences have all played their part, including, for example, the rise of a fresh phase of a women's movement in different regions of the country; the establishment of 'women's studies' as an area of research by the ICSSR in 1978 and subsequently via the offices of the University Grants Commission in 1983; feminist movements in the western world and in Asia; and the UN women's decade inaugurated in 1975. Not surprisingly, differences emerged over what kinds of data and scholarship were required for the development of the field. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that an unspoken consensus seems to have formed around a description of women's studies as 'neither a discipline nor a special topic, but a perspective that required articulation in every discipline, institution, in all studies and at all levels' (Desai et al. 1999). Such a self-description called for a far-ranging questioning of existing dominant systems of knowledge and their conceptual and organisational paradigms

Like most new fields—and precisely because it was never projected as a parallel discipline—women's studies has been heavily dependent on the existing structure of higher education, and its allocation of problems and aspects of Indian society among different disciplines. How and where do 'women' figure in the social sciences? What sorts of problems relating to women could not be easily 'housed' within academia? Which feminist issues have become dense subjects of inquiry and debate over the last three decades? Where are the major gaps and impasses today? These are the kinds of questions that a history of women's studies in India would have to address.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the discipline of sociology, given its long-standing preoccupation with subjects like marriage, kinship, family, caste, community and stratification—all clearly concerning women and vast areas in themselves—would be fertile soil for feminist approaches to the study of women and gender, and would play a major role in defining the field of women's studies. And yet this does not seem to have been so, despite the discipline's unusual reflexivity, and despite the repeated emergence of gender and feminism as subjects of dispute.

Explaining this anomaly has proved to be much more difficult than I had originally imagined. As it turns out, the case of sociology is particularly elusive and paradoxical, belying my initial expectations that it would be the most active disciplinary site for feminist exploration. After all, the popular perception of sociology is that of a soft, 'feminine' subject, where women students are far more visible than in the other social sciences. It is also true that departments of sociology were among the first to introduce courses on gender and women's studies (Rege 1997; Uberoi 1989). In what sense, then, am I claiming that the relation between sociology and women's studies has not lived up to its anticipated potential?

Because the contours of both sociology and women's studies are so fuzzy and undefined, it may be helpful to think of them as open-ended, inter-active domains within an 'intellectual field', to draw on a critical concept from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. An 'intellectual field' for Bourdieu is not the aggregate of individual or group activity, but more akin to a magnetic field, a 'system of power lines', 'so many forces which, by their existence, opposition or combination, determine the structure of the field at a given moment in time' (Bourdieu 1968: 161; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Approaching the multi-layered and institutionally heterogeneous domain of women's studies through the conceptual lens of an intellectual field might help clarify the admittedly partial perspective I am adopting in this paper. It is a perspective that focuses more centrally on the new pressures and demands for the production of *knowledges on women and gender* that emerged from the 1970s, rather than on parallel efforts to affect policy and service outreach, or the all-important question of pedagogy and curriculum reform. This undoubtedly introduces biases and limitations. However, I would like to think that the present focus has its advantages, since it concentrates on the shift from earlier work on 'the status of women' and on women's education, to the interface of feminism and the women's movement with institutions of higher education.[2] The combination of my 'eccentric' position in relation to university structures and my location within a women's studies research centre might also help highlight the more—and less—obvious relationships between different disciplines and the evolution of a new domain like that of women's studies.

[2] Questions of pedagogy and curriculum reform would in any case be directly dependent on the kinds of reading materials available, and hence on the nature of scholarship being generated under 'women's studies'. The most common complaint and demand that we receive is to remedy the lack of materials that focus on contemporary India.

My own specific concern with the development and changing trajectories of women's studies has made me acutely aware of the power relations between different disciplines, disciplines that are themselves by no means hermetically sealed from one another. This is especially relevant for a discipline like sociology, whose subject matter is potentially unlimited and whose borders are particularly porous. Given that no discipline is an island, the influence of a particular discipline or sub-field is perhaps best 'tested' by its influence *beyond* its institutional boundaries. Consider, for instance, the power of economic approaches to development, which have extended well beyond the discipline of economics; or the emerging field of political theory, which today claims the attention of many—including sociologists—who are not located in political science departments. In this sense, André Béteille's particular worry that the introduction of 'feminism' into academia 'makes light of' the 'conventional demands' of scholarly disciplines is somewhat off the mark (Béteille 1995: 112). This is because *all* disciplines, located within an intellectual field, are pushed and pulled beyond their borders, in a complex process which, in turn, shapes new domains and gives them direction. The problem, of course, is that this process is quite uneven, and is, therefore, experienced unequally across different disciplines. The fact that sociology has been more vulnerable than other disciplines may well account for Béteille's excessive anxiety about the possible loss of identity and disciplinary 'purity'. But my own vantage point has provided a particularly fascinating illustration of the complex interaction between a structured intellectual field and the emergence of a new problematic like 'women'.

One could, therefore, think of sociological analyses of women and gender as nodal points within a larger force-field, such that they could, on the one hand, make a difference to the way sociology goes about its business, and, on the other hand, could shape women's studies. The problem is clearly not a matter of the 'absence' of feminist sociological scholarship, or a paucity of individual practitioners, which is far from being the case. Rather, the question boils down to 'the difference it makes' (to borrow the title of an early US anthology on feminist perspectives within the academy [Langland and Gove 1981]). What recognition have sociological analyses of women and gender received in sociology and women's studies? Where do they stand in relation to the agendas of the women's movement and to other democratic struggles for social transformation?

It is in this sense that the interface between sociology and women's studies has been a poor one, and has been detrimental for *both*. My arguments, therefore, move in two directions. If questions concerning

women, gender and feminism have not sufficiently enriched the central problems and concerns of mainstream sociology, then women's studies—as the 'academic arm of the women's movement', and therefore the women's movement itself—have also lost severely in the process. This paper will look at women and gender within sociology, as well as discuss the lack of a more strongly articulated sociological perspective within women's studies and its consequences for feminist politics. I certainly do not mean to paint a uniformly bleak or negative picture. Precisely because there are strong signs today that the situation is changing, and partly because of the interests of a new generation of researchers, persistent problems must be identified so that the gains may be greater.

This brings me to the next requirement for setting up my investigation. I have already mentioned the fact that questions concerning sociology in India have to be situated within the broader context of the intellectual field of the social sciences and humanities. In order to guard against unrealistic demands and expectations. it is also necessary to proceed *comparatively*, keeping other disciplines in mind. It would indeed be of limited value (and of no surprise to anyone) to demonstrate that the interfaces between sociology, women's studies and the women's movement have not been 'gender just', when such an ideal has not been realised in any sub-field or discipline; after all, women's issues have been more or less marginalised in *all* disciplines. My interest, therefore, is precisely in the calibrations of the 'more or less', and what this has meant for the map of women's studies—its highways and its less travelled bylanes. In order to plot the career of Indian sociology vis-à-vis 'the women's question', we thus need some kind of 'contrast class'—be it the gendered histories of sociology and anthropology elsewhere, or the comparative fortunes of other disciplines such as history, economics, political science, literature and so on, in India.

The first comparison that we are forced to make (and one that enters by default into any sociology classroom, whatever the specific theme), is with sociology and anthropology in the west. There can be little doubt about the normative, even hegemonic, positioning of the western disciplines in relation to the intellectual field in India. It is surely interesting in itself that western anthropology—rather than sociology—has had a much more formative influence on Indian sociology, with sociologists in India invariably connecting up with anthropology departments abroad in their training and research. The reasons for this are not hard to find, given the western anthropological mandate to study 'other' cultures, the advancement of anthropological research from the colonial period onwards in countries like India, and the early emergence of 'native' anthropologists who needed to be

methodologically equipped to study themselves. The historical influence of the paradigms of western sociology has been less direct and certainly much more unevenly institutionalised. Though this is a fascinating subject in itself, what consequences follow for issues of women and gender?

As it turns out, western anthropology has nurtured a rich and long-standing tradition of research on women. Henrietta Moore, among many others, has called attention to the uniqueness of anthropology as the discipline where women were not traditionally ignored (Moore 1988). From the early 1970s onwards, feminist researchers entering the discipline of anthropology have been busy expanding the field as well as interrogating interpretive grids that left women present but 'muted'. In subsequent decades, new scholarship actively sought to overcome the limitations of an exclusive focus on women rather than on gender relations more broadly. Moreover, these anthropological debates were not simply theoretical. In the late 1980s and 1990s, especially in the United States, methodological and political challenges concerning the 'self' and 'other' structuring the ethnographic enterprise threatened to bring about a crisis in the discipline itself, one in which feminists played a prominent role.

With so much debate and controversy in western departments of anthropology, some of which led to major rethinking about the very future of the discipline, the contrast with sociology departments in India is striking. Of course, having emphasised the active participation of western feminists, it is important not to over-state the case. Feminist ethnographers in the west continue to battle against processes of marginalisation and lack of recognition. This may partly explain why such significant feminist discussions of ethnographic method and the self/other dilemma (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1990; Bell et al. 1993; Gordon 1988; Stacey 1988; Strathern 1987) have not received much attention in India. Furthermore, as I have argued in an earlier study, western feminist anthropologists found ways of resolving their institutional problems mainly by turning their gaze homewards, and converting their own national spaces into sites of fieldwork. Only too rarely did they think of their prior sites of professional engagement—'other' places—as places structured by local or 'native' feminist scholarship.[3]

[3] For a fuller exploration of this argument, see Chapter 4 of John (1996a). A representative example of the turn towards home can be found in Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (1996). Important initiatives, such as RC 32 'Women in Society' of the International Sociological Association (which bore fruit in publications such as Dube et al. [1986]) or Women of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, have not been strong enough to combat this relativistic trend.

In spite of these caveats, however, I do believe that a significant contrast is evident in the gendered trajectories of western anthropology and Indian sociology. The most obvious difference seems to be that it has been much easier for western feminist anthropologists to perceive themselves as making theoretical and political interventions, whether about the category of gender, the self/other distinction, or, indeed, about the very future of the discipline itself. Anthropological studies on women have, in their time, spilled out well beyond the discipline—consider the popularity of Margaret Mead's studies of gender in Samoa for American society at large, or the significant use of anthropological materials in Simone de Beauvoir's *The second sex*, the founding text for 'second wave' feminism in many parts of the world. No such landmark sociological work comes to mind in our context. Within the discipline itself, the dilemmas of women researchers have largely been perceived as 'practical' ones, at least until recently.[4] As a result, the larger consequences of their work for sociology or for women's studies have not been foregrounded.

Unfortunately, contrasts between 'us' and the 'west' can only too easily defeat their purpose, if they merely underscore the status of the west as the norm, thus magnifying 'our' deficiencies. (This is also why there can be such a strong temptation to invert such contrasts by demanding an 'indigenous' or more authentically 'Indian' approach in direct opposition to the west). The comparative approach I am advocating is intended to achieve something different; it also hopes to problematise the perceived 'advantages' of western feminism. But before discussing this further, it would be useful to compare, however briefly, the interface of gender and sociology with the place of gender in other Indian disciplines. What does the gender/discipline interface look like in, say, economics, history or political science among the social sciences, or in a humanities subject like literature in contemporary India?

With the important exception of political science, all these disciplines have witnessed a more visible involvement of feminist scholarship, a visibility directly attributable to the new scholarship from the 1970s and 1980s. These were the decades of 'women/gender and development', and of an enormous outpouring of studies on women's work, some of it undoubtedly driven by international aid agencies.[5] A

[4] Early discussions on the problems of female researchers can be found in the essays by Veena Dua (1979), Leela Dube (1975) and Chitra Sivakumar (1979), and subsequent ones in the anthologies edited by M.N. Panini (1991) and Meenakshi Thapan (1998).

[5] For more detailed discussions of the gendered interface of economics see U. Kalpagam (1986), Nata Duvvury (1989) and Mary E. John (1996b).

wide range of related issues and fields—health and demography, the environment, property rights, the effects of structural adjustment policies, and so on—have evolved in tandem with questions of development, frequently working with (or in the shadow of) economic concepts and paradigms, and undertaken by many with no prior training in economics. Even though most mainstream economists (with notable exceptions) continue to be utterly blind to gender, there can be no gainsaying its critical presence in a number of contemporary economic debates. History has also been a major disciplinary site of feminist debate and seen significant achievements. The 19th and early 20th centuries were dramatically 'recast' in light of scholarship on the controversies over women's status during the colonial period and with the rise of nationalism, leading to fresh approaches to key themes like tradition and modernity (e.g., Chaudhuri 1993; Krishnamurthy 1989; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Sinha 1995). Explorations into ancient Indian history, too, have helped unsettle well-entrenched myths concerning the 'golden age' of Indian womanhood. Moving to the humanities, recent and ongoing discoveries concerning the interventions of women writers have, on their part, challenged the literary establishment. Feminists have produced major critiques of the history of the discipline of English literature, drawing attention to hitherto neglected questions of translation and culture, and going well beyond the conventional confines of the discipline in the process (Joshi 1991; Sunder Rajan 1992; Tharu and Lalita 1991, 1993). In the face of all this activity, the significance of sociology for women and women for sociology has been that much more elusive.

There is, then, a recognisable problem here: How might one describe and analyse it? Some clues about why it has been difficult to foreground women in sociology are available in the textbook anthologies produced under the Oxford in India Series in Sociology and Social Anthropology—*Social stratification* (Gupta 1991), *Religion in India* (Madan 1991), *Family, kinship and marriage* (Uberoi 1993), and *Social conflict* (Jayaram and Saberwal 1996). In the first two volumes, the subject of women or gender is not alluded to at all, whether in the editorial introductions or in the essays chosen for reproduction. Given this absence in volumes intended to be representative of the discipline, one is therefore forced to conclude that gender issues have made no significant difference to debates on stratification or to questions of religion in sociology. Matters change somewhat in the subsequent volume, in ways that would repay a closer look.

In her perceptive and wide-ranging introduction to the anthology *Family, kinship and marriage in India*, Patricia Uberoi begins by contrasting student attitudes to the study of kinship (perceived as technical, anthropological, the study of primitives and tribals), and the study of the family (the domain of 'common sense', cherished cultural values, but also of anxieties and conflicts). She goes on to add, however, that

> [v]ery few of the papers in this collection directly address themselves to the experiential problems of Indian family life, and the practical politics of contemporary Indian kinship and marriage.... But they do, I believe, provide the academic language and framework—concepts, terminology and comparative reference—whereby these issues may be approached and made speakable. It is important I think that this should be done (Uberoi 1993: 2–3).

This problem is also discussed in the preface, though from a different angle. Here Uberoi specifically mentions that her engagement with feminist theory had provoked her to try 'to reconstrue the field of Indian family, kinship and marriage from a gender-sensitive perspective'. But she found that her efforts proved unsuccessful, because, as she puts it, 'the field has already been shaped by other forces and priorities' (ibid.: x). There is yet another related reference, this time in the conclusion of the introduction, where Uberoi remarks on the absence of sociological work on (*a*) the qualitative dimension of sex, marriage and family life, and (*b*) domestic violence. Surely something symptomatic is visible in these repeated, but never elaborated, incursions into what is variously called an absence, a failure, and an urgent need.

In other words, disciplinary compulsions—those 'other forces and priorities' directing scholarship on kinship, descent groups, marriage, and even debates on social change (these being the headings under which the essays of the volume are organised)—have been distanced from feminist agendas. Of course, this is not to say that none of the pieces chosen for the anthology explicitly draws on feminist concerns. For example, Tiplut Nongbri's essay, 'Gender and the Khasi family structure' (the only one that actively deploys the concept of gender), discusses the effects of the Meghalaya Succession Act of 1988 in the context of common (mis)perceptions of female power in the Khasi tradition, and reveals the complexity of shifting gender relations in the modernising drive from matriliny to patriliny (Nongbri 1993).

Ursula Sharma's contribution is another essay that foregrounds women's unequal place in the family—this time in relation to analysing

dowry in north India. Now, 'dowry' should have been an ideal theme for a mutual interrogation by feminism and mainstream theories of marriage and the family, thereby enabling the cross-fertilisation of sociology and women's studies. Since this has not really happened, the subject of dowry becomes an especially useful entry point for understanding the problematic relationship between sociology and women's issues (Sharma 1993).

As is well known, some of the first nation-wide campaigns of the women's movement in the late 1970s focused on the giving and taking of dowry. These campaigns precipitated the shocking discovery that dowry harassment by in-laws frequently culminated in wife-murder. (These murders were formerly described as suicides and had never been investigated.) Feminist protest resulted in widespread media attention and provoked fundamental changes in investigative procedures, medico-legal documentation and the law.

The very first issues of the journal *Manushi* vividly described some of the early campaigns in the city of Delhi in 1979—the demonstrations to the homes of in-laws, and the stories of families who successfully broke off their daughters' engagement when demands for dowry escalated. Pervading these accounts, however, was also a deep sense of disturbance. Feminists were at a loss to comprehend how 'the same mother who is humiliated by an arrogant son-in-law, who trembles for her daughter's happiness in an alien home, finds it so easy to tyrannise and torture her son's wife' (M. Das 1979: 16). Over the years, considerable rethinking and debate has gone into the aims served by taking up dowry murder cases, and not simply because many women's groups suffered emotional burnout from this kind of exhausting case-work (Vanita 1996). For one thing, some feminists now believe that the wife's parents are also culpable, in so far as they are responsible for sending their daughter back to her husband's family, often repeatedly, despite knowledge of her victimisation. Moreover, rethinking the relation between dowry and women's inheritance rights has also resulted in shifts from earlier positions (e.g., Kishwar 1993; see also Palriwala 1989; Palriwala and Agnihotri 1996).

In the wake of the dramatic politicisation of dowry in the late 1970s and early 1980s, dowry was a subject crying out for sociological attention. However, it is surely significant that when M.N. Srinivas was invited to give a special lecture on the subject in 1983 for a women's studies audience, he began by invoking a similar uneasiness about the difficult relationship between sociology and feminism to that invoked by

Uberoi above. Srinivas remarks on the problematic relationship between perspectives on dowry as an 'unmitigated evil' and a 'burning problem', and the perspective of the sociologist, who 'cannot help being fascinated by it, and being impressed with its strength and resilience. But this very fascination with an institution and his awareness of its strength might result in his being accused of being a reactionary who wants the institution to remain' (Srinivas 1984: 7). Srinivas's lecture ranges far and wide, touching on regional differences in the practice of dowry and bridewealth, caste stratification and hypergamy, modernity and the rise of new class fractions within the urban middle classes, and so on. Indeed, given this range, his concluding remarks on the need for a social movement to eradicate dowry through the promotion of gender equality is at odds with all that was said before, since gender is *not* specifically discussed in the course of the lecture. Ursula Sharma's essay in the anthology edited by Uberoi, on the other hand, does concentrate much more centrally on women's unequal place in the family and increased vulnerability as vehicles of property transactions during marriage. But she then acknowledges that feminist protest has been hampered because the very same institution of dowry 'strengthens the hand of the mother-in-law', thus dividing women among themselves.

The example of dowry contains critical ingredients for a diagnosis of the difficult relationship between sociology and 'women'. First of all, this 'social evil' does not divide neatly by gender, and therefore escapes a simple feminist analysis. Second, it is important to note that its economic and commercial aspects could be tackled much more easily within the women's movement than its embeddedness in the sphere of familial relations. The catalytic role of modern urban consumerism has been frequently highlighted in order to account for the spread of the practice of dowry and of dowry-deaths across the country, and it is often made out to be the fundamental cause. But what is even more interesting is that *this is also the emphasis of sociologists* writing on the subject—Srinivas claims that the 'humble beginnings' of the 'monster of modern dowry' lie in the 'access to the organised sector' acquired by modernising urban and rural communities (Srinivas 1984: 10–11); Sharma, too, highlights economic factors in the current 'hypergamous competition' for desirable grooms. In other words, *both* feminism and sociology in India share a common legacy, whereby it is much easier to politicise the *economic* dimensions of an issue whereas its more directly *social* and *cultural* dimensions tend to be left in the background. Why, otherwise, has the institution of marriage itself—at once so compulsory and so precarious—which the

issue of dowry presupposes, and which provides the vital micro–macro institutional link for fleshing out the 'personal is political' in this context, received so little attention? The answer before us is that the discursive registers in which themes such as family, kinship and marriage were pursued within Indian sociology and anthropology precluded close reciprocal relationships with feminist struggles—the spheres of 'culture' and 'politics' have largely eluded each other.[6]

The effects of this legacy are similarly discernible in the very different treatment meted out to the 'family' compared to the 'household' as institutions of analysis and engagement. While we have numerous feminist studies of the household, especially as a unit of property, production, consumption and distribution—that is to say, primarily as an economic unit—there have been few comparable studies of familial relations, at least in the post-independence period.[7] The family has been more frequently a subject of feminist social and cultural analysis in pre-independence history—particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries—when women's status was seen to be almost exclusively tied up with questions of education, marriage, mothering and widowhood, all of which were subjects of intense public debate and conflict before they were taken out of the colonial public sphere by cultural nationalism.[8]

In this context, the nature of the interrelationships between sociology, women's studies and the women's movement in the initial post-independence decades is particularly illuminating. Looking back from

[6] The best effort I know of for integrating gender within an overview of family and kinship studies is by Rajni Palriwala (1994). This monograph expressly draws attention to gender as 'a relation [where] women are women in concrete relations with other women as well as men, in a range of disparate but articulated contexts and situations'. Palriwala also believes that 'material conditions, culture, history and agency ... are in a sense the four very broad and overlapping terms to address'. It is therefore all the more telling that even in her fine treatment, aspects of culture (as well as caste and community) are neglected and that the full force of treating gender/feminist issues beyond 'the conjugal tie as the model of gender relations' (ibid.: 67) is not sufficiently developed.

[7] The sociological literature has itself been concerned to clarify the distinction between the two concepts, as, for instance, in the work of A.M. Shah (1974, 1996), but without exploring the gender dimensions involved. Maithreyi Krishnaraj has attempted to bring the concepts of 'household' and 'family' together in her introduction to *Gender and the household domain: Social and cultural dimensions* (the fourth in a series of volumes devoted to a study of 'women and the household'), and proposed the notion of 'the family-household domain' (Krishnaraj 1989). For an excellent recent discussion of the problematic legacy of the family in Indian sociology, see Patricia Uberoi (forthcoming).

[8] For further discussion and debate over these issues see Partha Chatterjee (1994), Geraldine Forbes (1996), Mary E. John (2000) and Tanika Sarkar (1993).

the 1980s, pioneering women's studies practitioners like Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj, for instance, largely dismissed prior sociological analyses of the 'role conflict' of the middle-class working woman (a common Ph.D. topic assigned to young women researchers in the 1950s and 1960s, we are told). They were equally critical of anthropological 'descriptions of the position of elite women in family, marriage and kinship networks' (Desai and Krishnaraj 1987: 7). Moreover, in her content analysis of articles on women and gender in the professional journal of the Indian Sociological Association, the *Sociological bulletin*, Sharmila Rege has made a related observation: in the post-1975 decade, 'women became relatively *more invisible* in the pages of the *Bulletin* as compared to the 1950s and '60s' (Rege 2000: 59; emphases added). Rege clarifies that while there was a sharp fall in articles on marriage and family at this time, and an increase in the number of studies of social movements and political processes, only one tangential reference to women's movements was made.

From a comparative perspective, therefore, the neighbouring disciplines of economics and history appear to have been harnessed more easily for exploring 'women's issues' than sociology/anthropology.[9] In this connection, it is necessary to examine how the intellectual field of the social sciences was shaped by the agendas of a modernising nation. As Satish Deshpande has argued, whereas disciplines such as economics and history became centrally implicated in the political past, present and future of the nation-state,

> sociology appears to have inherited a profoundly ambiguous and disabling self-identity. In the areas where it could have had a role to play in the process of nation-building, it suffered encroachment from both of its more assertive neighbours.... Thus the dynamics of social change were appropriated by economics in the present and by history in the past. What remained was the ensemble of caste, religion, and

[9] A richer, more nuanced exploration of the fortunes of anthropology during the early post-independence period would have to include the work of Irawati Karve (1953), Kathleen Gough (1952a, 1952b, 1955, 1959), Leela Dube (1975, 1993, 1997), and Dube et al. (1986) among others. Leela Dube's recent autobiographical account mentions that her early interest in kinship in the 1950s 'was based (though unknowingly) on its intimate association with women's lives' (2000: 4041). The experience of being a member of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1971–74) changed her perspective, and, together with other influences, resulted in 'critical evaluations of earlier studies and theories, ... revisitations to communities and problems that had become the staple in ethnography, and freshly designed studies with a conscious new focus' (Ibid.: 4044).

> 'customs and manners'—areas of considerable ambivalence and embarrassment for the modernist aspirations of the emerging nation... (Deshpande 1994: 575).

However, Deshpande neglects to mention the critical spheres of family and marriage, which, taken together, had definite implications both for the priorities subsequently identified by the women's movement, as well as for the conceptual resources drawn upon for theorising and politicising specific women's issues.

Recognising that the intellectual field structuring the relations between sociology and women's studies in contemporary India can only be understood as part of the historical legacy of the last century has a further advantage: it enables us to place in better perspective my earlier remarks on the comparatively stronger legacies of feminism and anthropology in the west. Having seen how the troubled interface between sociology and women's studies repeatedly translates into the contrast, tension and conflict between the 'social' and the 'political' in our context, it is striking that a different pair of terms is central to the western debates. There, the classic structure of opposition is between the sphere of the social or cultural, on the one hand, and *nature*, on the other.

This does not mean that I am denying the strong associations quite commonly invoked in many non-western societies, including our own, between women, femininity, fertility, reproduction, images of 'nature' such as the earth, and so on (e.g., Dube 1986). My point, rather, is a prior one. Beginning in the 19th century in the west, the assignment of women to biology was itself laboriously *produced* (and older Christian heritages reworked) in emergent fields such as biology, medicine, psychology and psychiatry. There is nothing natural about the hystericisation of women's bodies, the privatisation of the family, and the confinements of motherhood—all of which have been well documented in modern European history. However, one of the effects of all this groundwork is that, even in the hands of a revolutionary like Freud, 'biology is destiny' as far as the successful development of femininity is concerned. Simone de Beauvoir's celebrated statement 'one is not born a woman, but becomes one' was meant precisely to counter this massive institutional and discursive deployment (still poorly understood in her own time), whereby the *biological* facticity of sex became a burden unique for women, not for men. Following de Beauvoir, many feminists felt the imperative to break the association between women and nature (subsequently articulated in the sex versus gender distinction) in order to prove that the structures

of patriarchy and sexual difference are fully social and cultural, and are therefore open to transformation. Sociology and anthropology have played very crucial roles in this campaign. In fact, cross-cultural differences in conceptions of male and female, and the nature/culture controversy, have held an extremely vital (if problematic) presence in this feminist debate.[10]

However, the direction and logic of the 'recasting (of) women' in India, to use the well-known title of the path-breaking collection of feminist essays on colonial India, was significantly different, as I have already mentioned. Feminist historical researches provided insights into the complex battles and negotiations between reformers, nationalists and colonialists; they critiqued the role of the middle-class Hindu upper-caste home and family as a privileged site of nationalist culture. They showed how the very civilisational 'level' of India through the ages came to be problematically measured by claims of the rising/falling 'status' of Indian women. Far from having to insist that 'women' were fully social beings (and having to draw on anthropological evidence of other cultures to prove their point), feminists in India have had to contend with a legacy wherein 'Indian womanhood' has from the outset been saturated with society/culture.[11] Aspects of Indian culture and society—especially those relating to caste and community—have persistently impinged upon 'the women's question' in the political history of the last two centuries. Moreover, as we have seen in case after case in the closing decades of the

[10] The feminist literature is enormous. Classics in anthropology include Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974), Reiter (1975) and Ortner and Whitehead (1981). The sense of inaugurating a paradigm shift through the introduction of 'gender' into feminist theory is evident in a wide array of disciplines and fields (e g., Butler 1990; de Lauretis 1986; Haraway 1991; Moore 1988; Scott 1988; and the discussion in John 1996a).

[11] It should be obvious that my arguments do not preclude the presence of ideas of 'nature' and their normative functioning. I am simply drawing attention to the imbrication and shaping of what anyone would readily identify as cultural norms *even where 'nature' is at issue*. This is visible both in the archives of history, such as the 19th century Age of Consent controversy (Sarkar 1993), and in contemporary studies of kinship, e.g., Veena Das's analysis of 'the dialectic between the rules deriving from nature and the rules deriving from culture' in her study of Punjabi kinship (Das 1993a: 198).

However productive it may have been initially, the nature–culture problematic in western feminism appears at this stage to have run dry. Feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser (1997) have contributed considerably towards identifying impasses in current western debates. I believe that their discussions would profit from a better understanding of feminist predicaments in other locations such as ours. But, as I have already mentioned, such transnational interaction is rare. Rarer still is comparative feminist work across non-western locations.

20th century—the Shah Bano controversy, Roop Kanwar's sati, the problem of a uniform civil code and the current debates over reservations for women in Parliament—there is no natural 'woman' available for feminist politics, but rather 'always already' social beings, whose conflicted identities have offered impediments to the woman's movement. It is this problematic that needs to be more adequately addressed, by both sociologists *and* feminists.[12]

By way of a conclusion, let me emphasise two things that are crucial in this context. First of all, from the perspective of the women's movement, I am suggesting that we need to build upon as yet fledgling efforts at opening up new sites to political intervention—those sites, especially, that have been contained within the social and cultural spheres, namely, family, marriage, caste and community relations. Debates among feminists in these contexts have too frequently been polarised in unproductive ways. On the one hand, dominant tendencies within the women's movement have run into an impasse where attempts to advance the cause of women's rights appear to be blocked by questions of culture. The domains of the state and the law are the most frequent sites where these problems have arisen. On the other hand, there have been those who have sought to rescue Indian culture and its diversity from modern state power, but at the cost of effectively depoliticising the social and cultural dimensions of women's lives. An example of this would be Madhu Kishwar's defence and celebration of the arranged marriage in India, against western 'love marriages' (Kishwar 1994; for a different discussion see John 1998). My own suggestion is that feminists today need to rethink what can count as effective political action. This is why I have been urging that we try to forge new relationships between the social and political, which in turn implies that there is so much work to be done at the borders of sociology and women's studies.

Second, it is often said, quite rightly, that one must undo the static, closed or essentialist versions of kinship and community that have been produced in much mainstream anthropology and sociology (e.g., Palriwala and Risseeuw 1996). Till recently, this meant bringing in the

[12] Veena Das's book *Critical events* (1995) offers an interesting illustration of our problematic. The essays in the book address themselves explicitly to the culture/politics interface of contemporary India, and therefore do much to redirect the resources of sociology/anthropology for present-day political problems. However, barring the essay on the Partition of India, where Das acknowledges the pioneering work done by feminist scholars on this theme, none of the other essays draws on feminist discussions that have grappled with the issues she analyses.

'wider' realities of economic and political processes as they affect women's lives and support structures. However, the very dimensions of kinship, community, caste and family relations have tended to get lost or underplayed in the process. But it is precisely these dimensions—the gendered aspects of caste inequalities, minority rights, ideologies of the family, the regulation of sexualities and so on—that have acquired a decisive importance in contemporary society. Indeed, there is a new danger that institutions such as the family are now being conceived of as the central, even exclusive domains where the subordination of women is produced. (This tendency is visible, for example, in much current analyses of women's political representation in the panchayats, where the single most important measure of success or failure is the amount of influence wielded by male relatives.) There is every reason to believe that the subject matter of sociology will be increasingly drawn upon in the coming years as women's studies evolves further. As different disciplines within the intellectual field undergo processes of mutual realignment, it is vital that sociology not turn into the 'missing' dimension that must be tacked onto, or, worse still, displace pre-existing economic or political analyses. The real challenge goes much deeper. As in all genuinely creative interdisciplinary work, what is at stake is the *transformation* of the field of women's studies through the creation of new subjects of analysis.

Rather than piece together 'inner' and 'outer', 'narrower' and 'wider', 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' factors, we require richer, more grounded conceptions of the conflicted locations different women occupy as subjects in the social world and as political agents. Only then can we hope to break new ground along the fault lines of active theory and thoughtful practice and so respond meaningfully to the urgent tasks of the day.

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JAVEED ALAM, *India: Living with Modernity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. 241 pp. Notes, references, index. Rs. 425 (hardback).

At a time when Indian academia is getting choked with postmodernists and postmarxists, it is a relief to read someone who is neither. Javeed Alam draws our attention by arguing passionately how harmful, indeed fatal, the 'seductive charm' of postmodernism could be for emancipatory politics of any kind, particularly so in the underdeveloped, poverty-stricken, conflict-ridden parts of the world. However, Alam is no orthodox modernist or Marxist himself. The departures he makes from such orthodoxies are no less significant. His perspective is original and his ideas fresh and unconventional. One could disagree with him but not dismiss him.

Given that Alam is both a scholar and an activist, his concerns are theoretical as well as political. The book is divided accordingly into two somewhat interpenetrating parts. The first part deals with philosophical and theoretical issues involved in discussions on modernity/postmodernism; the second applies insights thus gained to illuminate some issues of perennial socio-political contestation in India.

It is not Alam's position that postmodernists are wrong in critiquing modernity. He himself readily admits all that is wrong with modernity: abstract individualism, foundationalism, instrumental rationality, divorce from normative concerns. He insists, however, that postmodernists are fundamentally wrong in assuming that only this kind of modernity was and is possible. Alam argues that diverse forms of modernity were philosophically and theoretically possible. These too could have been historically realised, were ascendant and assertive capitalism not to favour one particular form and help it to develop at the cost of others. Calling this form 'entrenched modernity' and agreeing that it is oppressive, disempowering, demeaning and dehumanising, Alam has no doubts that it must be overthrown. But rejecting modernity in all its myriad forms as postmodernists do is banal as well as barren. Postmodernism offers no socially applicable agenda of resistance and in effect depoliticises society.

Alam believes that modernity is 'corrigible'. He wants those who stand for popular emancipatory goals to rework modernity and recover what he calls its 'unembodied surplus': all that in its alternative traditions which is more humane, open-ended and sensitive to cultural context. Alam suggests that we take a closer

look at Hegel and Marx. Both believe in progress, yet their dialectical approach replaces the dichotomous and foundationalist categories.

Coming to India, Alam refers to the widely held view that 'colonialism is but a necessary extension of modernity', and its logical corollary that colonialism (and neocolonialism) cannot be fought unless we fight modernity itself. This has led to 'indigenism', the belief that prior to alien interventions there existed in India a stable, cohesive and harmonious civilisation which was intrinsically superior to whatever was introduced later. Indigenism constitutes a call to the faithful to reject and renounce all that is alien, necessarily 'debilitating' and 'corrupting', and return to the roots.

Indigenism mythologises history by screening out evidence of internal contradictions, tensions and discords. Propagated by majoritarian leaders as 'national culture', the sanitised version eventually takes hold of the popular imagination among majorities. Alam shows how this has happened in the case of Hindu nationalism. The chauvinism which characterised it during the anti-colonial period has grown into an open and aggressive intolerance.

Alam is agitated at the role postmodernists have unwittingly played in all this. By blurring the distinction between history and narrative, they have tried to deprive historians of the very tools of proving false the misleading and damaging acts of mythologisation and sanitisation. Alam cites specific instances of Indian postmodernists who have argued that 'secularism is an alien concept and cannot therefore acquire roots in Indian society'. He tellingly calls such positions 'inverted Eurocentrism': they ostensibly aim to fight western categories, but accept a western characterisation of non-western societies as primordialist, non-rational and static.

Alam's ire is not limited to postmodernists. He broadens his attack to include cultural nationalists and does not spare modernist nationalists like Nehru either. In his writings on world history, Nehru provides a secular materialist interpretation of how nations rise and how nationalism plays a negative as well as a positive role in the lives of people. When it comes to India, however, Nehru feels compelled to 'discover' an eternal nation. Forgetting his historical materialism, he invents a nation highlighting precisely what Hindu nationalists did, the Brahamanical tradition. Alam argues that such compulsions and concessions are perhaps the single most important reason why after independence Indian secularists never put up a resolute fight against communal forces.

Alam's views on Indian nationalism make up one of the most thought-provoking parts of the book. If colonialism is a necessary extension of entrenched modernity, nationalism based merely on anti-colonialism is its exact mirror image. Just as in the West nationalism sought to subsume nationalities and sub-national communities, so did Indian nationalism. Alam prefers to call such pan-Indian nationalism 'supranationality nationalism', which survives and thrives because of state sponsorship: 'The state leadership stuck unthinkingly at conceiving the "nation" as indistinguishable from the country-wide territory inherited from British colonial rule.... the national form that emerged out of European modernity became a mirror for reading our own situation.' Alam believes that

'liberal thought in India ... has to shed its obsession with the uniqueness of India as a nation and look at it as something mutable ... open to redefinitions'. He argues that the Left too may have to 'reassess nationalism even when it uses the nation as a platform for struggle against imperialism'.

Alam's vision of an alternative India recognises and respects the plurality of communities and nationalities. But what constitutes such communities is not 'high culture', which is always the preserve of the elite and is based on its exclusionary practices. These communities are formed by traditions 'actually experienced' in daily life by ordinary people. Such a culture would always be more open and willing to accommodate differences. Alam derives this notion of community from an open-ended and evolving category of 'social being'. This category combines class, cast and other social features in an effort to 'avoid the trap of defining class or caste as the main determinant of social consciousness'.

One hopes that the book will make Indian social scientists introspect about the questions it raises.

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SEKHAR BANDYOPADHYAY, *Caste, protest and identity in colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872–1974*. Richmond Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1997. xii + 324 pp. Table, map, notes, bibliography, index.

The Namasudras are traditionally identified as Chandals by the upper castes in Bengal, yet, as a subaltern political formation, they played a pivotal role in shaping local and nationalist politics in colonial Bengal in the period between 1870 and 1940. In itself this observation should be compelling enough for the more serious Indian sociologist to engage with this historical narrative given the impoverished status that the subaltern commands in mainstream Indian Sociology. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's richly documented historical text maps the political history of this untouchable community, tracing its moments of convergence and divergence, solidarity and betrayal as they attempt to make their way out of untouchability using the weapon of their caste identity. With a twin focus on agency and ideology, the author successfully foregrounds the dual nature of Namasudra politics While swearing complete allegiance to colonial rule on the one hand and rejecting the upper caste dominated nationalist movement in colonial Bengal on the other, they were able to reap considerable political and economic gain from the colonial rulers.

Situating the subject within the historical context of a political movement, the narrative encapsulates the entire movement from its origins in the 1870s when the Namasudras set out to overcome their untouchability status, to the 1940s when large sections of the Namasudra elite were successfully integrated economically, politically and culturally into mainstream Bengali society. The narrative, which spans seven odd decades, is replete with rich details which delineate the critical moments that mark the evolution of this political movement. These include the emergence of an economically mobile settled agricultural Namasudra

group from their traditional fishing and boating occupations; the role of these well-to-do Namasudras in providing leadership to the movement; the consolidation of Namasudra caste solidarity with aspirations for higher status mobility; the embracing of the Matua religious sect to provide religious and cultural legitimacy in their efforts to remove the status of untouchability; their ability to access the resources of modernity, such as education, job reservations and political power, by offering complete allegiance and support to the colonial rulers; their capacity to use their caste solidarity and numerical strength to bargain with upper caste nationalist leaders for removal of their untouchable status.

Working through the dynamics and contradictions that underlie each of these moments, the narrative brings out not only the crucial role of caste politics in the larger context of the nationalist movement in Bengal, it also describes the conniving role of the colonial rulers in the way they used Namasudra solidarity both numerically and ideologically to undermine the anti-colonial campaign of the nationalist movement.

The engagement with the subaltern has been an enduring theme among modern Indian historians in the past few decades. History from below has no doubt provided visibility to an otherwise indistinguishable mass of discontent. Yet, it is this very moment of visibility that also invokes a critical reckoning of the subaltern identity with its accompanying politics of emancipation. Seen from such a standpoint, the Namasudras are driven entirely by self-interest with their political manoeuvrings and strategies no different from the politics of those they perceive as their oppressors. Thus, their staunch resistance to joining the swadeshi movement, or their support for the partitioning of Bengal, or their reluctance to join hands with the nationalists, etc., are political choices essentially dictated by the self-interest of the Namasudra elites. In the final instance, it is these wealthy, educated Namasudra elite who realise that their own class interests are not very much different from those of their upper caste counterparts in the nationalist movement. That this subaltern elite finally joins hands with the upper castes in the Congress party must in fact be seen as the ideological limit of an 'identity' based politics so inescapably devoid of any class sensitivity

Equally revealing in this regard are the sordid attempts of the Congress to obtain Namasudra support. The persistent, often active, rejection of the Congress clearly implied the absense of a mass base for the nationalists. Strategies of all sorts to befriend and accommodate the Namasudras proved a failure. Even resorting to communalising the discontent of the Namasudras by driving a wedge between Hindu and Muslim Namasudras proved unsuccessful. For the Namasudras, it was the resistance to change by the upper castes in their attitudes to untouchability, which was the main obstacle to unity. They regarded the upper caste led nationalist movement with profound suspicion—both the ideology of nationalism as well as the aspirations of its leadership.

Sekhar Bandyopadhayay's political narrative on the Namasudras remains, however, a strictly historical work whose strength lies more in its eye for detail rather than a critical engagement with the structures and processes of a colonial

modernity which served as the site on which Namasudra politics took root, flourished and eventually collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions. Some attempt to theorise the power relations underlying the political trajectory of subaltern caste politics in colonial India would no doubt enhance the quality of political analysis in this otherwise richly detailed historical narrative. Quite clearly, there were across the length and breadth of India lower castes and untouchable groups mobilising themselves in the space offered by colonial modernity to protest against their oppression and exploitation by the upper castes. Equally, Congress leadership of the Indian national movement was denounced by lower caste and untouchable leaders throughout the country, yet the politics of such subaltern groups as the Namasudras, the Mahars and the Chamars failed to evolve a strategy of emancipation that would truly benefit the vast majority of their caste members. There is a growing need for both historians and sociologists to revisit the sites of colonial modernity, not to reaffirm the enlightenment ideals of progress, but rather to understand how colonial modernity itself reproduced the structures of oppression and exploitation under the guise of emancipation.

St. Xaviers College EDWARD A. RODRIGUES
Mumbai

INDRA DEVA and SHRIMALA, *Society and culture in India. Their dynamics through the ages*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1999. xi + 295 pp. Index. Rs. 550 (hardback).

Co-authored by a sociologist and a Sanskrit scholar, the book claims to provide 'a genuine sociological understanding of Indian social structure and culture' through analyses of classical Indian/Sanskrit texts. It brings together papers published by the two authors on the subject in different journals in India and abroad over the last three decades or so. Though Indra Deva and Shrimala are not the first to undertake such an exercise, the authors claim that their work is different from the already available writings of similar nature that suffer from many limitations. Much of the available Indological writings, for example, tend to emphasise the uniqueness of the Indian tradition and ignore its historical dynamics.

They begin with a warning that though the classical Sanskrit texts are an indispensable source for understanding the foundations of the Indian civilisation, they need to be viewed keeping their specific historical contexts in mind. The texts cannot be read without taking their contexts into consideration. 'The tendency generally has been to accept the statements made in ancient texts on face value, without critical judgement' (p. 12)

However, despite such critical reflections in the introductory chapter, the treatment of various subjects in the following chapters is quite flat and uncritical. Even obvious things, such as the social background of the authors of the texts being analysed, do not find mention in their writings.

Repeating a rather clichéd thesis, the authors claim that the foundations of the Indian social structure were laid during the Vedic era. They claim that the

'essential' features of social institutions and attitudes that mark the Indian society today 'could be seen taking shape in the early hymn of Rgveda' (p. 43). They contend that the most important event in the history of the Indian civilisation was the arrival of the Aryans. Institutions like caste, family and the village communities that characterise Indian society evolved in the region for the first time out of the nature of interaction that the Aryans had with the native population. For example, the authors attribute the 'low' status of women in Indian society to the fact that the settler Aryans did not have enough women of their own and were compelled to take wives from the indigenous population, whom they regarded as low in status and untrustworthy.

Despite their criticism of earlier Indological works for ignoring the historical dynamics of Indian society, the papers presented in the book do not go beyond analysing the texts. They tend to treat Indian society as one unified whole with a common cultural history. Different communities, castes, regions are all projected as sharing the fundamental values of an Indian civilisation. Continuity, not change, was 'the most remarkable feature of the Indian society' (p. 27). This claim is best reflected in the chapter on the 'latent function of the doctrine of karma'. The authors argue that the ideology of karma in which presumably all sections of the Indian society—including those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and the non-Hindus—had an 'unshakeable faith' worked as an 'invaluable' means of social control. Not only do they ignore the available empirical evidence that contests such an assumption, they also seem to be unaware of the not so recent critiques of such orientalist constructions of the Indian past!

The book, however, could still be of use particularly for introducing some of the classical Hindu concepts to students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Panjab University SURINDER S. JODHKA
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BEN ROGALY, BARBARA HARRISS-WHITE and SUGATA BOSE, eds., *Sonar Bangla? Agricultural growth and agrarian change in West Bengal and Bangladesh.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 424 pp. Tables, figures, notes, references, index. Rs. 505 (hardback).

After the devastating famine of 1943, Bengalis were promised a '*Sonar Bangla*' (golden Bengal) by their politicians. Since 1947, very little has been done in the two Bengals to fulfil that promise. The Bengalis were let down by successive political regimes. What, then, went wrong? The fourteen contributors to this volume have done an excellent job in examining the myths and realities surrounding '*Sonar Bangla*'. Most of the papers in this volume were presented at a conference on agrarian change in West Bengal and Bangladesh held in Calcutta in 1995. The essays cover three crucial areas in the study of agrarian change: (*a*) agricultural growth, poverty and well-being, (*b*) policies and practices; and (*c*) changing agrarian structures. An unprecedented growth in foodgrain production took place in

West Bengal and Bangladesh in the mid-1980s. The Left Front government in West Bengal claimed success for its radical land reforms programme, and Bangladeshi policy-makers attributed the credit for this growth to liberalisation and structural readjustment. Several of the contributions draw our attention to the transition that took place in foodgrain production from the early 1990s. This triggered the debate on the agrarian reforms programme in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Many contributors have used official figures to show what caused the slides in agricultural growth. One of the chief merits of the book is that it unfolds both 'success' and 'stagnation' stories.

The first section begins with a historical overview of agrarian conditions in Bengal by Sugata Bose. He examines regional variations in agricultural growth in Bengal and the development of different kinds of production relations. According to Bose, much can be learnt about the agrarian situation in Bengal till 1947 by examining the role of the colonial state. He describes at length two aspects of Bengal agriculture in the colonial period, commodity production for capitalist markets and low levels of production investment. He notes that during the British period, the principal modes of exploitation and relations of appropriation had shifted from rent to land-lease arrangements. There are four essays in this volume that explore different aspects of foodgrain production. Haris Gazdar and Sunil Sengupta use crop production data from official sources and point out that the main cause of agricultural growth in West Bengal in the 1980s was the use of High Yielding Varieties, (HYVs) of *aman* crop and the spread of groundwater irrigation. In Bangladesh, too, according to Shahabuddin, HYVs and groundwater irrigation account for the rise in foodgrain production. The essays by Richard Palmer-Jones and Ben Crow explore other aspects of foodgrain production in Bangladesh. Palmer-Jones, for instance, takes into account the liberalisation policy of the state and the spread of *boro* cultivation in explaining agricultural growth. Crow rightly notes that the overall growth figures tell us very little unless we examine regional variations in foodgrain production. He analyses at length the regional variations in crop production within Bangladesh, and shows how surplus is appropriated at the levels of production and distribution. An essay on inter-district variations in food production in West Bengal would have added to the volume.

The editors have selected four interesting essays on policies and practices. The contributors to this section convincingly show that a great deal could be learnt about agrarian growth and stagnation by critiquing the state. Dwaipayan Bhattacharya has done this in his study on the 'Politics of middleness'. Glyn Williams and Arild Engelsen Ruud deal with the question of empowerment of the rural poor through institutional reforms. Williams explains the role of the panchayati system in raising political consciousness, and Ruud looks at the steps taken by the Left Front government in eradicating untouchability. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the role of the state in agrarian change has not been covered adequately. Only one essay, by Shapan Adnan, raises some issues regarding state intervention and the rural poor. According to Adnan, liberalisation policy has benefited a small section but impoverished rural masses. Adnan

has left out from his discussion the role of donor agencies in influencing the agrarian programme in Bangladesh.

The third section contains four chapters on changing agrarian structures. Geoffrey Wood examines the factors that account for the persistence of small farms in Bangladesh even after the use of new technology. Both Wood and Neil Webster emphasise the significance of water control and its management in Bangladesh and West Bengal. According to them, control of water resources is as crucial as access to land in contemporary Bengali agriculture. Two unexplored areas in the study of agrarian structure in Bengal are migration and agricultural markets. Ben Rogaly explains the effects of seasonal migration on agrarian structure, and Barbara Harriss-White draws our attention to the dynamics of agricultural markets.

Most of the essays in this book have been written from a multidisciplinary perspective. The contributors have dealt with agrarian problems within a comparative framework. The use of macro- and micro-level data has enriched their findings. The book is an important contribution to the existing literature on agricultural growth in West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Delhi School of Economics ABHIJIT DASGUPTA

RAMACHANDRA GUHA, *Environmentalism: A global history*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000. xiv + 161 pp. Table, plates, bibliography, index. Rs. 295 (hardback)

This is a wonderfully told story of the history of the emergence and evolution of environmental ideas over the past century-and-a-half. Guha uses the writings of poets, activists, academics of various callings, and politicians of various hues of red and green, to trace the roots of and courses taken by various strands of environmental thinking. One is introduced, then, not only to key ideas on the environment, and their thematic and geographic trajectories, but also to a whole slew of personalities, some better known than others as commentators on the environment.

Guha identifies two waves of environmentalism. The first, initiated during the middle of the 19th century, was in response to the pollution generated by the industrial revolution, and to the massive deforestation that was taking place in the colonies around the world. The second environmental wave traced by Guha has its origins in the 1960s, ignited by Rachel Carson's passionately written *Silent spring*, which takes its title from the disappearance of the bird that traditionally heralded the arrival of spring—the robin, victim of the huge increase in pesticide use all over the United States. If the first was in many ways an intellectual response to observed environmental phenomena, the second wave saw a transformation of these ideas into social movements, including groundswells of protest that forced governments in various parts of the world to adopt some or the other element of a variety of environmental agendas.

Through both the first and the second waves of environmentalism, Guha suggests that three distinct strands of thought can be traced. The first, 'Back to the

land', a call to society to return to a simpler, less consumerist lifestyle; the second, 'Scientific conservation', insistently focused on the abilities of science and centralised state control to sustainably manage the use of natural resources; and the third, the 'Wilderness idea', focused on the setting aside of areas within which wild flora and fauna could flourish, and within which humans could enjoy the aesthetic beauty of nature, undisturbed by permanent human habitation.

Guha points repeatedly to the continuity of ideas across these two waves of environmentalism, suggesting that if the environmental movement of today is a child of the 1960s, 'it is also ... perhaps a grandchild of the 1860s'. Each of the three themes just mentioned appears in both waves. If William Wordsworth, Ruskin Bond and Edward Carpenter were part of the first wave of environmentalism, and key proponents of a simpler lifestyle in the middle of the 19th century, then Arne Naess, a close student of Gandhi, has been one of its most vocal champions in the latter half of the 20th century. Similarly, if American, British and German foresters were at the forefront of scientific conservation between the 1860s and 1920s, then, more recently, North American and European environmentalists have worked closely with government agencies to use science and centralised control to force industry to reduce pollution. And if colonial hunters in India and Africa insisted on the setting aside of areas free of native populations, within which they could hunt and spend their time in leisure, their counterparts exist today within myriad conservation agencies around the world, all calling for the setting aside of wilderness areas free of any form of permanent human habitation, within which leisure activities are permitted and encouraged.

Moving on from a discussion of ideas, Guha takes us through various environmental movements of the past few decades, his lively pen taking us from the activism on the American west coast, through rural England, to the Amazon and the killing of rubber-tapper cum activist Chico Mendez and the Chipko movement in the Indian Himalaya. A lengthy essay on the rise and consolidation of the Greens as a force in German politics makes for fascinating reading.

Through this discussion, he makes the key point that the ability of environmental protest to flourish as a movement is largely linked to the nature of the political space within which such protest is articulated. Within the USSR between the 1930s and the 1980s, within Socialist China today, and within the Nigerian dictatorship, any questioning of development from an environmental perspective has been ruthlessly eliminated. Environmental reform is most critically linked to political reform, as can be seen from the fact that those parts of the world most committed to political freedom, the West in general, have also managed to put in place environmental legislation that is the envy of environmentalists in most other parts of the world.

Guha stresses the fact that the presence of structural inequities with regard to the ability to access natural resources has invariably been at the core of protests within the Third World. While industry has had carte-blanche access to timber, water and other natural resources, and the unquestioned right to pollute these resources, it is the poor, who depend on such resources for their livelihoods,

who are both blamed for their destruction and forced to bear the brunt of the environmental damage resulting from industrial expansion. Most environmental protest in the South has its origins in the fight against such inequality. It is a fight for resources and for livelihoods, rather than a fight on behalf of the creatures of the plant and animal kingdoms.

Although Guha does not explicitly make the point, there are interesting parallels and differences with regard to the predominant character of environmental movements in the First and Third Worlds. Comparable with movements that highlight issues of environmental justice in the Third World, is the ongoing fight in the American north-west, where wildlife lovers have called for a ban on further logging within old-growth forests. Lumberjacks and others threatened with losing their jobs in the timber industry have coined the bumber sticker 'Are you an environmentalist, or do you work for a living', nicely capturing a hostility expressed by many poor communities all over the world. On the whole, however, the wilderness lobby in most parts of the Third World tends to be small, largely confined to a small, largely apolitical, and therefore ineffective, urban middle class, in stark contrast to a large, often politically motivated middle class in the western world.

This is a brief book, and one that covers a great deal of intellectual and activist terrain—both temporal and geographic. Even so, Guha has written a compelling and highly readable history of environmentalism.

Delhi VASANT SABERWAL

PURNENDU S. KAVOORI, *Pastoralism in expansion: The transhuming herders of Western Rajasthan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999 xvi + 209 pp. Tables, figures, maps, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 495 (hardback).

AND

ROBERT M. HAYDEN, *Disputes and arguments amongst nomads. A caste council in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. xiv + 177 pp. Tables, notes, references, index. Rs. 395 (hardback).

By comparison to settled villages and communities, fieldwork with nomads requires ceaseless travel and unanticipated encounters with all sorts of people, some sympathetic to nomads and others dubbing them disparagingly as a 'band of criminals'. Because of the arduousness of fieldwork, studies of nomads have generally been limited. Therefore, it is heartening to note that in the last five years, several worthy studies of nomadic and pastoral nomadic (and semi-nomadic) communities in India have appeared. Based on solid empirical foundations and fieldwork extending over many years, these works have filled an important gap in our knowledge. Two examples are Kavoori's study of pastoralists in Rajasthan and Hayden's study of the Tirumal Nandiwalla, a touchable, non-pastoral nomadic caste of Maharashtra, ranked below the Marathas.

Kavoori has been working on the pastoral, semi-nomadic communities of Rajasthan, and their migratory pattern, from the mid-1980s. As mentioned in the section on methodology (pp. 19–22), participant observation of a migratory pastoral group was conducted from 1986 to 1987; then, forty-five villages from five districts of Rajasthan were surveyed in 1988 and resurveyed in 1993; and in 1993, surveys were carried out in neighbouring states. Nowhere are we told who collected all the data, which is highly detailed and longitudinal. Did the author undertake the mammoth venture of data-collection himself, or was he assisted by a research team? A critical look at the process of data-collection—and not the quantity and quality of data—especially the survey methodology, would have definitely enriched the book. In the name of an account of fieldwork with pastoral nomads, an area on which we do not have good material, the readers may look at the picture (Figure IV.4) of the author (as evidence of the I-was-there experience), bearing the (colonial) title 'Saheb goes on fieldwork'!

All this experience of a decade-and-a-half goes into the aptly titled book, which argues that pastoralism will not become extinct, as has been suggested by certain observers, some of whom have regarded transhumance as a 'disease' (p. 191) and the pastoral nomads as 'criminals' (p. 139). Building on his data, Kavoori demolishes the commonly held idea, usually derived from isolated newspaper reports, about the breakdown of the synergism between pastoralists and agriculturalists. In none of Kavoori's villages were the migrating herdsmen considered by local peasants as law-infringers; rather, they were viewed as 'ordinary people earning their livelihood' (p. 141).

This, however, does not eliminate the fact that peasants do not welcome pastoralists except when their fields are fallow (p. 143). In order words, notwithstanding the traditional ties between peasants and animal-breeders, the testimony of which may be found in different villages, there is no doubt that migratory shepherds are constantly made to face volatile situations and are always under serious constraints and threats. The fear of encounters with a variety of exploiters, both real and imagined, has serious implications for pastoral nomadic existence.

Instead of focusing on the experiences of a single pastoral community, Kavoori has endeavoured to present a cross-cultural picture of pastoralism by considering important pastoral communities (viz., Raika, Ahir, Gujar, Sindhi Muslim) of Western Rajasthan. A work of this type—macro in nature—has its own merits, but does not address the issues of inter-community variations and responses to similar situations, which are of significant academic value to anthropologists and sociologists. The problem with interdisciplinary work is that, as the author himself points out (p. xv), it does not meet the rigorous standards of any specific discipline. Perhaps a narrow specialisation has more to offer than the put-all-in-one approach espoused by multidisciplinary research.

A few corrections about the Raikas: their migratory groups vary widely—some are exclusively male and have far fewer numbers than Kavoori suggests. The Maru Raikas accept Godwar Raika women as wives (hypergamy), but the opposite is not true. The Maru Raikas are reputed to breed camels and not sheep.

In comparison, Hayden's book is typically in the anthropological tradition. Not only is it a study of a particular caste rather than of several different castes, it is also highly focused, devoted to one of the least researched topics, viz , the dispute-processing institution of caste council (panchayat) among the Nandiwallas, a caste of a service nomads who eke out their livelihood by performing tricks with their bulls.

Hayden writes that because of the relative isolation of the Nandiwallas, their panchayat is largely untouched by the modern legal system. At the same time, the Nandiwalla panchayat has practices that may have been common to other castes, for instance, the presence of a Brahmin teacher (guru) However, an interesting observation is that with the settling down of the Nandiwallas, their panchayat has also declined. Hayden tells us that the same process is at work with the other nomadic castes of Maharashtra: the panchayat is active when they are peregrinating, but when they sedentarise, the traditional council is gradually pushed to the margin. Hayden thinks that nomadic existence prevented people from taking recourse to the legal institutions of the state. That was the reason for their dependence upon the councils. Once they ceased to be nomads, they started exploring state institutions, leading to a waning of their own panchayat system.

This argument presumes that the institutions associated with a mobile existence are difficult to sustain when the community settles down, when it no longer 'prizes mobility'. In other words, institutions do not become 'cultural values' that continue to survive despite the nature of existence of people. To give an example: it is said that perpetually moving communities (foragers, for example) have fewer personal belongings, for it is difficult to carry them from place to place. But, even after settlement, it has been noted that their personal belongings do not increase, because keeping only to the essentials is a cultural value among them. These values tend to transcend the facts of mobility and sedentary life.

Keeping this in view, certain questions surface: Surely the panchayat system is an embodiment of cultural values, and not just an instrument to resolve conflicts? Besides processing disputes, panchayats also perform the function of creating solidarity among people and maintaining their identity. Would these factors not nurture the existence of panchayats even when the social context has changed? The panchayat may become a rallying point for people rather than simply a dispute-processing mechanism. Caste panchayats have not dis appeared; they have been transformed and taken on newer functions. In contemporary India, panchayats are certainly not institutions 'whose time has passed', as Hayden says (p. 161).

Hayden calls his work an example of 'salvage ethnography' (p. ix), he renders a detailed account of an institution which the Nandiwallas do not now have. We hope some anthropologists take up a study of the political institutions of the contemporary Nandiwallas to examine the transformation of their panchayat and the form in which it now exists. The bulk of Hayden's fieldwork was

conducted in 1975 and 1979, though he made a supplementary visit to the Nandiwallas in 1992.

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RAMACHANDRA GUHA and JONATHAN P. PARRY, eds., *Institutions and inequalities: Essays in honour of André Béteille*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. ix + 302 pp. Tables, figures, plate, notes, references. Rs. 595 (hardback).

This anthology brings together eleven original essays written in honour of André Béteille, who with his theoretical innovativeness and punctiliousness for data has earned a niche for himself in Indian sociology. While reflecting the wide range of Béteille's interests, these essays deal, in one way or another, with the central theme in his oeuvre, namely, 'the nature of social inequality and the nature of social institutions that create, mitigate, reproduce or intensify this inequality' (p. 23).

In the opening essay Ramachandra Guha traces Béteille's career and credo. Briefly reviewing Béteille's important works, Guha is struck by their 'methodological subtlety' and 'theoretical precociousness'. Not surprisingly, Guha finds *The idea of natural inequality* to be the best and the most deeply felt books of Béteille. Guha draws particular attention to how, without denying the importance of caste, Béteille sought to identify the emerging principles of social stratification; how, though influenced by Marxian methodology, he distanced himself from the Indian Marxist view of caste; and how, in contrast to the dominant 'sociology of ideas', he offered a 'sociology of interests'. Guha also highlights the salience of the comparative approach and the field-view in Béteille's sociology.

Revisiting the Brahmins of Tamil Nadu, the subject of Béteille's first book, *Caste, class and power*, C.J. Fuller shows how, despite almost completely losing their political and administrative power at the state level, Tamil Brahmins continue to be well placed both in the material and cultural spheres. Caroline Humphrey contrasts the fate of previous social ranking in Russia and China: if, by equating ethnicity with class, the Chinese communists reinforced native social distinctions among the Yi and Mongol peoples, through wholesale collectivisation, exile of traditional leaders and attacks on their religion, the Russian communists radically altered patterns of inequality among the Buryats.

Pranab Bardhan compares the different approaches of economics and sociology to the study of agrarian structure, and stresses the reciprocal benefits of crossing the disciplinary boundaries. Focusing on the question of caste returns in the Indian census, Nandini Sundar provides a historical analysis of the politics of caste, and examines the methodological issues in relation to data reliability, validity and use. Jonathan Parry's ethnographic study of the Satnamis in the Bhilai Steel Plants presents a more positive picture on the policy of job reservation than that suggested in Béteille's writings on protective discrimination.

Moving from state policy to individual agency, Vinay Kumar Srivastava presents a 'field-view' of a traditional social institution, namely, renunciation, as practised by the Raika (a middle-caste grazing community) of Rajasthan. Analysing two unrelated cases, Mattison Mines highlights the layperson's role as 'heterodox trendsetters' in south Indian social history. Jan Breman provides a personalised account of the communal conflagration in Ahmedabad following the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid.

Delineating the major strands in the Indian debate on 'civil society', Dipankar Gupta places Béteille in the strand which seeks to nurture rational-legal institutions (such as universities, hospitals and law courts) that intermediate between the individual and the state. Not only does Gupta find this lacking 'a rounded rationale that grounds these intermediate institutions in a larger perspective', he also bemoans that as a consequence 'citizenship gets short shrift for no fault of its own' (pp. 246 and 247).

Comparing the work of Béteille with that of Alexis de Tocqueville, both comparative analysts of equality and inequality, Alan Macfarlane discerns more than 'merely a resemblance between these two thinkers'. Considering the 'great amount of continuity', Macfarlane, in fact, views Béteille as 'one of the heirs of Tocqueville' (p. 285).

Interestingly, the sequencing of the essays in the anthology 'broadly follows the evolution of Béteille's career' (p. 26) From the changing patterns of stratification (Fuller, Humphrey) through agrarian structure (Bardhan) to the politics of caste (Sundar) and the policy of protective discrimination (Parry), the first set of essays focuses on the original interests of Béteille. The second set of essays deals with recent themes in Béteille's work—the place of the individual in social history (Mines), institutions in civil society (Gupta), and communalism (Breman). Fittingly, the final essay relocates Béteille in the grand tradition of comparative social theory (Macfarlane).

Concluding his introduction, Guha alludes to the criticism that Béteille 'has not devoted sufficient attention to the institutional reproduction of his brand of sociology', i e., 'he has not built a formal, easily identifiable "school"'. The way the essays in this volume have been able to engage with, extend, and even dispute Béteille's conclusions and arguments shows that 'intellectual influence can work in ways other than the "guru-chela" *parampara*' (p. 26). A fitting tribute to the scholarship of Andre Béteille, indeed!

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AMITA DHANDA and ARCHANA PARASHAR, eds., *Engendering law: Essays in honour of Lotika Sarkar*. Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 1999. xiv + 415 pp. Notes, index. Rs. 400 (hardback).

In honouring the contributions of Lotika Sarkar, *Engendering law* seeks to generate an academic debate on the relation between law and society among feminist and legal scholars in India. It also emphasises the need to make gender a

central concern of legal theory. As the editors Amita Dhanda and Archana Parashar indicate in their introduction, legal research must move beyond analyses of legal doctrine alone. In fact, there has been comparatively little research done on the ideological bases of law and law's relation to social change; and, to be sure, to speak of gender in relation to law will allow us to foreground these and other issues. The striving for a gender-just society has often taken the form of the demand for equal rights between men and women. Since women's oppression is perceived to be the result of discriminatory treatment, much of the earlier effort by feminists was directed at the elimination of such discrimination and the provision of equal opportunities for women and men. Any failure to achieve gender equality was attributed either to disinterest or faulty implementation of existing legal principles, or even to a lack of awareness of legal rights. It soon became apparent, however, that formal legal equality alone was not enough to overcome gender subordination. Other feminists began to argue that non-discrimination against women also involved the recognition of differences between men and women. And, as the editors note, at issue in the sameness/difference debates in feminism was the question of how to define equality, with each stance fostering a corresponding feminist legal perception. The articles in the book present admittedly diverse perspectives on law, and are divided into four sections: legal institutions, legal norms, law and society, and law reforms. For purposes of review, however, a slightly different thematisation has been attempted.

One cluster of articles addresses the *gender aspects of specific legislations and judgements*, such as the Consumer Protection Act (D.N. Saraf) and the Indian Penal Code (Ved Kumari). Despite the seemingly neutral terms in which legislative provisions are framed, a close reading reveals the deeply patriarchal nature of law that draws unthinkingly on gendered assumptions regarding femininity, biology and sexuality. Yet, the solution to this can hardly lie in having separate laws for women (K.N.C Pillai). Responding to, and disagreeing with the proposal for a separate criminal law for women put forward by the National Commission for Women, Ved Kumari argues for the need to make the legal system gender-sensitive as a whole S.P. Sathe, in his reading of Supreme Court cases, underlines the stances taken by the judges towards gender justice. While many judges reiterate existing ideas about gender roles in their interpretations of the law, he argues that some do strive to bring about a change. While noting individual interpretations of law, it is, however, vital to broaden the critique of law so as to include its form and substance as well.

The question of the content and extent of legal reform has been an important issue for feminists and legal scholars alike. B. Sivaramayya's article brings out the gap between reform proposals and their actual enactment into law, in the context of examining the government's responses to the recommendations of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women. The agenda of reforming personal law and the idea of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) has generated a great deal of debate in recent years. The tensions between formal and substantive equality figure prominently in A. Jacob's discussion of what would constitute a

gender-just law for the Christian community. Other scholars (N. Chadha) examine the problems with laws that seemingly recognise the special needs of women. The question of how to achieve social change through legal reform is centrally addressed by Chhatrapati Singh, who contends that in order to bring a holistic approach to bear upon the regeneration of wastelands, changes in a whole range of laws—forest and land laws, labour laws, family and property laws—would be necessary. Both U Baxi and N. Haksar offer an analysis of the human rights discourse. The latter focuses on the conflict between feminist and civil rights perspectives, underlining the need to produce a critique of law and help evolve a new jurisprudence Drawing on the instance of a sex-trafficking case, Baxi discusses the reliance on a language of human rights and feels that the law and state only combine to extend the power of patriarchy. He also argues for a shift in the way we think about rights, especially by questioning notions of objectivity and neutrality.

The construction of legal knowledge forms the broad ground traversed by a third cluster of articles. To fundamentally change the very conception of legal knowledge, it is necessary to bring out its non-universal, situated and gendered nature (Ramanathan). The need for interdisciplinarity in legal scholarship is emphasised by Parashar's article, which also provides a considered framework on which such a legal education could be based. Karlekar's piece on widowhood in 19th century Bengal stands at the interstices of such interdisciplinarity and focuses attention on voices of resistance even among the most oppressive conditions. Dhanda's perceptive article shows how women's dissent is 'psychologised'—rendered as an individual trait of a disturbed mind rather than as a social problem—by judicial processes. This leads not only to a denial of the rights of dissenters, but also reinforces role stereotypes.

A final theme that figures in the volume is *the complex relation between the women's movement and the law*. Its characteristic ambivalence is contextualised and mapped by Vina Mazumdar, who provides specific illustrations drawn from the campaign regarding political representation and violence against women This has ranged from the conviction that law can play a positive and vital role in achieving a gender-just society to an increasing disillusionment with the legal process itself. There is also the accompanying realisation that an excessive reliance on law for ushering in gender equality would be unrealistic and misplaced if wider exploitative structures are not simultaneously tackled.

As in most edited volumes, there is considerable heterogeneity in the perspectives voiced through individual articles. While some are confined to dissecting the working of law through particular Acts and a range of legal actors and institutions, others seek to raise deeper issues of context and a critical jurisprudence. What also needs to be conceptually addressed, however, is the problematic role of the State, which, in setting itself up as the guarantor of rights, appears unmindful of the gendered circumstances in which such rights work. Overall, a useful addition to the steadily growing literature on gender and

law, especially from the point of view of inducting a feminist perspective into legal education.

Hyderabad SEEMANTHINI NIRANJANA

NIVEDITA MENON, ed., *Gender and politics in India* (Themes in politics series). New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. xi + 539 pp. Tables, notes, references. Rs 650 (hardback).

Gender and politics in India edited by Nivedita Menon brings together in one collection feminist writings with diverse focii. The outcome is a significant book that maps the concerns of the contemporary women's movement in India. Published as part of the 'Themes in politics' series edited by Rajeev Bhargava and Partha Chatterjee, this collection of essays draws attention to the range of subjects and issues that Indian feminists have addressed and analysed. The essays included are by academician-activists who are well known in the field of women's studies. In fact, these essays have been reprinted from journals and other anthologies where they appeared earlier. They are grouped here under seven broad themes: 'Environment', 'Work', 'Law', 'Women's movement', 'Community and rights', 'Victimhood/Agency' and 'Sexuality'.

The effect of bringing these articles together in a collection under different theme headings has been to place them in dialogue with one another. The structure of the book also points to a process by which issues are identified and analysed by a particular writer and, in many instances, elaborated upon by another. The method used depends as much on cross-referencing as taking issue with arguments proposed by earlier writers. The immediacy of concern and the issues at stake are in evidence from the very outset. *Gender and politics in India* opens with the feminist debate involving Vandana Shiva, Gabriele Dietrich and Bina Agarwal on environment. This debate brings into focus the different dimensions of a woman's situation, such as her class, caste, community, or work, even when dealing with a subject such as environment that was till recently unmarked by gender concerns. In the course of discussions of these kinds, notions of gender and identity are also probed.

The collection of articles in *Gender and politics in India* also brings home the fact that the women's movement has faced some very difficult and contentious issues. These issues have problematised distinctions that have for long been taken for granted. By questioning frameworks that endorse these distinctions, whether in terms of the private and the public or the individual and the collective, feminist writing has in effect introduced many complex questions into political theory. The note of introspection in almost every article in this collection is unmistakable. Perhaps this mode of open self-reflection is unique to the women's movement.

Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana probe the humanist premises that configure the very subject of feminism in 'Problems for a contemporary theory of gender'. Issues raised in the wake of the anti-Mandal agitation, the Chunduru

massacre and the anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh, the spread of Hindutva and the campaigns against the government's use of hormonal contraceptives are used to examine the mode in which gender issues are articulated. Nivedita Menon's essay 'Rights, bodies and the law: Rethinking feminist politics of justice' is, similarly, an exercise in theorising the assumptions that animate the initiatives of the women's movement in relation to the state and the law. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's article 'Institutions, beliefs, ideologies: Widow immolation in contemporary Rajasthan' is an example of feminist analysis that seeks a holistic understanding of the cross-cultural, social, political and economic dimensions of an issue, *sati* in this particular case. The essay by Nandita Shah et al. on 'Structural adjustment, feminization of labour force and organizational strategies' is yet another example of feminist research that combines conventional notions of methodological rigour with a sensitive understanding of women's situation while providing a perspective that conflicts with mainstream arguments about structural adjustment.

The imaginative scope of feminist writing also arrests one's attention when going through the book. Some of the articles provide a programme of action that seems almost utopian. In 'Impact of technological change', for instance, Rohini Hensman makes a persuasive case for using technology to benefit women in all areas of their work. Ratna Kapoor and Brenda Cossman's upholding of court cases that endorse the model of substantive equality similarly points to a latent, and rather hopeful, demand that all court rulings should be guided by the substantive approach to equality. That such demands are placed within an actual atmosphere that engenders cynicism rather than hope is remarkable in itself. It speaks of a vital feminist imagination that is at times critical for bringing about change.

Gender and politics in India includes a multitude of voices and styles. The selection of articles is informed by the need to provide the reader with a range of issues and a sense of the debates taking place. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah's extract 'Organizations and autonomy' from *Issues at stake* and Radha Kumar's essay 'From Chipko to Sati: The contemporary Indian women's movement' discuss questions of power equations, ethics, democracy, decision making, funding, etc. These are questions that have concerned women's groups for a long time now. Ilina Sen's article 'Feminists, women's movements and the working class' captures a moment of confrontation between an understanding of the women's question from a class-centred viewpoint on the one hand and a woman-centred perspective on the other.

Each writer brings to her article a 'passion' that has the salutary effect of elaborating on the notion of feminist politics. I use the term 'passion' in the sense of having a role to play in politics, in the sense used by Veena Das in 'Communities as political actors: The question of cultural rights', included in the book. This passion is as much in evidence in Vidya Rao's composition 'Thumri as feminine voice' as in Ruth Vanita's 'Thinking beyond gender in India'. Both pieces present their arguments in a style that is marked by an

unusual blend of subtlety and force. The style as much as the argument compels a rethinking of the notion of gender.

In spite of the range of subjects dealt with in the book, some very recent areas of debate and discussion have been left out. Feminist issues in relation to mental health, education, culture and film theory have not been included Subjects such as health, which have been of long-standing and critical importance to the women's movement, find very brief mention in the introduction written by Nivedita Menon to the book. Given the wide canvas that the book has to cover in order to give a comprehensive picture of feminist politics, it is understandable that all issues covered by feminist politics are not exhausted in the book. It is noticeable, however, that in contrast to the highly nuanced arguments that Nivedita Menon presents in her article referred to earlier, her introduction to the book is rather simplistic and disappointing Menon writes that she seeks to 'present a picture of Indian politics, in broad strokes, derived from the large body of feminist scholarship spanning decades' (p. 2). The end result, however, is a sketchy introduction to the women's movement that flattens out many critical and significant arguments.

In conclusion, it also needs to be noted that we are at that phase in the history of the women's movement when discussion of a host of issues, whether of class, caste, community or location, is definitely taking place, but their articulation is mostly by urban middle class and upper caste women. While perhaps this is an almost inevitable consequence of our history, we are yet to see a feminist anthology that provides a perspective on gender and politics in India from the standpoint of women who are closer to the experience that is being theorised. While *Gender and politics in India* is undoubtedly a significant addition to feminist studies, it is also not a book of this kind.

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SUDHIR CHANDRA, *Enslaved daughters: Colonialism, law and women's rights*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. xii + 249 pp. Notes, epilogue, appendices, index. Rs. 495 (hardback)

AND

INDRANI CHATTERJEE, *Gender, slavery and law in colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. xii + 286 pp. Notes, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 525 (hardback).

The two volumes under review are an exercise in socio-cultural and legal history. Woven from archival sources, they touch upon the colonial legal mediation and its impact on Indian society in two different contexts. The specific focus of both of these books is on gender, as the titles themselves suggest.

Chandra's book represents an illuminating account of a recalcitrant woman refusing to offer her personhood to a husband whom she disliked because of his

indolent and irresponsible existence. Married at 11 to a man of 19, Rukmabai developed a strong dislike for her unconsummated marriage while she stayed with her rather enlightened stepfather who was obliquely associated with liberal reformism. After a long wait of ten years after the onset of her puberty and following the refusal of several informal initiatives to consummate the marriage, Dadaji, the husband, in a fit of pique and instigated by his scheming uncle, filed a suit in the Bombay High Court for the 'restitution of conjugal rights' on 19 March 1884. With this the stage was set for battle.

The unrelenting obduracy of Rukmabai who preferred to face litigation and endure any punishment accorded to her by the colonial legal dispensation rather than submitting her personhood, unleashed pitched ideological battles and organised protests in the socio-cultural and intellectual domains. It turned out to be a battle between reform and orthodoxy, liberals and conservatives, colonial and native; each of these camps either supporting or opposing the move and thereby the women's cause. The crucial issues which cropped up and were hotly debated in this controversy were: individualism versus community, Hindu versus non-Hindu, preservation of family versus break in familial bond, and, eventually, the emancipation of woman versus upholding and restoring tradition.

The apparently polar categories like 'native' and 'colonial', 'orthodox' and 'reformist', 'liberal' and 'conservative' involved in this battle were not internally coherent or consistent. These diverse discourses coalesced and conflated at certain crucial junctures. All of these discourses shared in varying degrees a visceral fear about the idea of the emancipated woman. This deep-seated anxiety about female sexuality brought the 'barbaric' native and the 'civilising' colonial together in a common bond: both were apprehensive of the social chaos which they saw as an inevitable consequence of Rukmabai's stance. While the colonial authorities were expressing anxiety about the inferior status of womanhood in India, they were opposing an ongoing feminism at home. Justice Farran's verdict in March 1887 against Rukmabai, legitimising and restoring the right of the husband over the body and sexuality of the wife, can be seen against this backdrop.

Unknown to Hindu law, the 'restitution of conjugal rights' was imported from British jurisprudence. Based on the European notion of marriage as a 'contract' between two adult consenting persons, the *restitution* was justified in the case of Hindu (infant) marriages based on 'sacrament' and bereft of consent. The British judges held supreme the reactionary aspects of Hindu law maintaining the subordination and subsumption of woman/wife to man/husband while erasing and de-valorising the pluralism within Hindu law. This is encapsulated in Marc Galanter's phrase that the English procedure curtailed some substantive rights while it amplified others.

Finally, the author is able to demonstrate a link between the hoary past and the living present as far as the dominant perception about women in India is concerned. The restitution of conjugal rights, which was scrapped in Britain in 1970 as it was perceived to be violating the basic rights of women, still continues in

India, upheld by the Supreme Court in its verdicts in the 1980s (cited by the author in the epilogue).

The book is a valuable exercise in legal history from a feminist perspective. Though not a path-breaker, it has been written with unusual theoretical depth. In richness of language and style it is extraordinarily eloquent.

Chatterjee's book studies the multiple distortions and final rupture brought about by the colonial state in the ruling Nizamat establishment of Murshidabad in Bengal. This process was set in motion during the latter half of the 18th century, attaining its culmination around the middle of the 19th century. The pre-colonial edifice of the Nizamat polity and economy rested upon an institutionalised slavery; at the core of this slavery was the legal structure—an amalgam of customary laws and certain ingredients of classical Islamic jurisprudence.

The legal political fabric of the Nizamat betrayed a different version of slavery which, according to the author, cannot be understood through a Euro-centric understanding of slaves as necessarily atomised, dispossessed and disenfranchised entities. Cleaved into four chapters titled exquisitely, the book basically states that (*a*) the pre-colonial Nizamat polity was based on a legal structure which accorded a web of claims and rights to slaves and slave-borns; and (*b*) in the refashioning of the Nizamat polity due to the political and economic expediencies of the colonial state, a modification of the existing legal structure was intrinsic to this process.

The logic and dialectic of kinship and kinlessness embedded in the customary practices of the Nizamat created space for status mobility of slaves in general. It specifically led to the incorporation of many female slaves into the rank of kinship through their reproductive success. Chatterjee gives a pithy description of the very precise codes through which slave women of the *haram* were made into wives and incorporated into kinship. The slave girl was bestowed with the title of Mirlakha, the nose-ring, the *bana* (ornament for forehead), seals and *sozni* (special cloth of seating) after bearing a son to the Nizam (p. 96).

The previous jural status of this (slave) mother did not determine the status of her sons and daughters—they were the legitimate heirs of the Nizam. Children of the slave concubines and those born out of isogamous marriages were treated as siblings. Usually, the isogamous marriages (*shadi*) of royal males were preceded by a *nikah*, which meant marriage with a slave woman in customary understanding (unlike in classical Islamic jurisprudence). The importance of the *nikah* can be gauged by the fact that these *nikahi* women, who were later delegitimised and vilified by the Company Agents and debarred from their stipends, often held the position of chief companionate of the Nizam. Thus, wifehood/motherhood marked the movement of many (slave) women into rungs of intimacy, of proximity to various males and master/mistresses as well as reproductive status (p. 93). Often, these slave women, recruited into kinship, also became the chief matriarchs or female heads of different *déorhis* (particular sets of apartments in the Nizamat where this matriarch, her sons and daughters and other dependents resided) and were themselves in possession of slaves of different

standing. This, according to the author, was paradigmatic of slavery in the Nizamat. The *déorhis*, constituting the inner space of the Nizamat, were in control of substantial fiscal resources and had certain political privileges and influenced Nizamat polity. It appeared strange to westerners for whom politics is always the domain of the 'public' and 'outer space'.

That motherhood elevated the status of slave women is reflected in the fact that many slave-borns, the sons of wet-nurses and *mughalinis* (waiting women), held high offices in the Nizamat and received high stipends. This takes us to another dimension of slavery in the Nizamat where kinlessness had its own reward and incorporation. The slaves purchased and 'bred' in the family were often preferred over and above blood ties. While blood kin were perceived as enemies, as too well connected a man could endanger the balance of power (p. 110), slaves, by virtue of owing their lives to rulers, were expected to guard them from the assaults of enemies *within*. 'Fosterage' and 'adoption' were also an accepted norm in the Nizamat. The most powerful women were the mothers of the Nazim who held a strategic position in the Nizamat.

The author delineates the two-pronged strategy of the East India Company in truncating the Nizamat polity through regulations and modifications of customary law as well as Islamic jurisprudence. This resulted in the decimation of the Nazim's rule with the simultaneous erosion of space and avenues of mobility for slaves. It obliterated the manumission available to at least some of the female slaves by virtue of being the mothers of the Nazim's children.

The Company tried to tamper with the Islamic and customary legal structure through the following measures:

1. Omissions in translating Islamic classical law
2. Selectively choosing between different schools of Islamic law and undermining the customary practices while mediating in court
3. Introducing the doctrine of illegitimacy of slave-borns by questioning the jural status of (slave) mothers
4. Introducing the element of disinheritance to debar the customary claims in the stipends of the deceased
5. Overruling basic kinship principles, like significance of elder-ship and seniority
6. Subtle misrepresentation of law and practice
7. Classicising the customary laws wherever it was found necessary in the colonial interest

Through the combined policy of retrenchment of Nizamat funds and refashioning of its legal structure, the Company sounded the death knell for the Nizamat polity. With this crumbled the safety net available to slaves, while the institution of motherhood, which had been a source of mobility for female slaves, was also rendered redundant. One crucial aspect which remains unexplored in the book, however, is the condition of those female slaves who could

not move upward in the status hierarchy. The author herself acknowledges at one point that all wives were not slaves just as all female slaves did not become wives or concubines of their masters (p. 89). The inferior status of these women was reflected in their very low stipends of Rs 3 to 12. Perhaps the lack of archival data may have prevented the author from going into the details of this aspect.

Chatterjee is not looking at Nizamat slavery from a meta-feminist perspective; rather, she is trying to understand it in its own right. She finds motherhood an important source of upward mobility for slave women in a medieval polity. The book demonstrates the limitations of western concepts in understanding South Asian realities. Pre-colonial slavery in the South Asian context cannot be understood through a public/private, slave/kin and male/female dichotomy. The text is rich in graphic representation of the cultural and symbolic domains of the Nizamat.

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TANIKA SARKAR, *Words to win: The making of Amar Jiban—A modern autobiography*. New Delhi. Kali for Women, 1999. x + 266 pp. Notes. Rs. 350 (hardback).

Words to win is a book organised with a purpose. Five essays build up the background to the text and precede the translation of the seventy-six-page long work. The essays orchestrate into a prologue to Rashsundari's narrative. This is followed by an Afterword entitled 'On re-reading the text' which deals with the significance of the text and the critical ways in which it can be approached in the present-day context. Since the beginnings of Women's Studies as a discipline in India, the translation of Rashsundari's autobiography—the first woman's autobiography in Bengal—has been awaited with great eagerness. No doubt the elaborate introductory essays are aimed at historicising the text and making the context of its writing clear to a larger audience who do not have access to the original.

The importance of the text lies in the way in which it maps one woman's committed struggle to teach herself to read. The process was hardly an easy one. In her own words: 'Those days, we did not see printed letters, the handwritten letters on the manuscript were immensely difficult to read. My reading was so painfully acquired!' The text stresses that apart from traditional prohibitions on reading for women, the burden of her household duties hardly granted her the much-desired leisure to read. But, as we come to know, it was her deep desire to read the *Chaitanya Bhagbat* that provided the main motivation. Unsurprisingly, therefore, her language too is steeped in the allegorical and metaphorical language of religious discourses. Her 'autobiography' thus has a larger significance.

In this context, it is important to recall Philippe Lejeune's warning about the genre of autobiography: 'It appears very difficult to link autobiography and

social history without first putting autobiography back into the vaster system of discourses.' It is impossible to understand the significance of Rashsundari's narrative without placing it within the Vaishanava discourses that were so much a part of her world. In her introduction, Sarkar takes pains to establish the provenance of this particular text, which is a modern autobiography on the one hand, and imbued with the vocabulary of Vaishnava bhakti at the same time. Bhakti provided women a space, and enabled the mingling of an oral tradition with Rashsundari's attempt to write her life. Sarkar herself uses tropes from Vaishnava literature as a metaphor for understanding the *raison d'être* for the text—the act of reading, she says, can be understood as a transgressive act just like the illicit love of Radha and Krishna. But in the absence of a more sustained theorisation, this insight becomes a mere gesture. She uses the translator's freedom to edit the text—pruning some of its repetitiveness, in the bargain leaving out Rashsundari's allegorical reflections on the mind. These reflections—particularly in the second part of the text which Sarkar merely excerpts—would perhaps bring out the ways in which reflections on mental states so common to oral traditions, Vaishnava and Baul cults alike, are carried over into a written text. Moreover, Rashsundari's language is highly allegorical, perhaps because she attempts to replicate the language of the *kirtanas* and *kathakata*, the two oral forms that she knew well. And it is particularly because the preoccupation with the mind and allegorical language seems to be so much a part of Rashsundari's self-understanding that one wishes that Sarkar would use her deep knowledge of traditions and their transmission to arrive at a more complicated theoretical understanding of women's selfhood within colonialism than what she offers. Sarkar underlines the importance of 'secrecy' and reads the text as a 'modern articulation about the inwardness of an individuated self'. But her emphasis on the subversion of tradition or the uses of tradition as one of the resources of the self hardly creates a space to ask the more interesting question about the indispensability of tradition to the very existence of Indian modernity. And, in the context of this autobiography, the indispensability of religious discourses to the conception of an individuated self-articulation.

The translation is jarring at places: 'Then my travelling companion gave me another smack on the face and exclaimed: "She is like a precious mirror, she bursts into tears at the drop of a hat"' (p. 142). The English idiom sounds highly inappropriate here; a very literal translation of the dialogue would read: 'She's like a much-adored looking glass, she bursts into tears even before you've said anything.' Sarkar's translated sentences at times simplify complex sentences, so flavour is sacrificed in the interests of fluency. For example, Rashsundari's response to the comparative ease with which women learnt to read during the late colonial period is translated simply as: 'It is good to see women having an easier time of it now.' What is sadly lost is Rashsundari's reference to a 'liberty, free of thorns' (*'nishkantak swadinata'*) that she perceives women to be enjoying. Thus, ignoring Benjamin's insight about the specific significance inherent in the original which manifests itself in a text's translatability, Sarkar simplifies

the structure of sentences in the attempt to assimilate Rashsundari's language into the discourses of feminist self-assertion and modernity. Perhaps that is why, too, she attributes the coining of the word '*jitakshara*' ('one who has mastered the word') to Rashsundari herself, ignoring the second meaning which the most distinguished Bengali lexicographer, Haricharan Bandyopadhyay, provides: 'one who is an expert at reading the alphabet at a glance'. It is the second meaning that bears a greater significance for someone like Rashsundari who taught herself to read by repeatedly looking at the alphabet, visualising and tracing them without having the opportunity of uttering them aloud. It is surprising that Sarkar claims not to have come across the word 'in better-known dictionaries' (note on p. 171).

The book would have gained substantially from a glossary and an index. Since the purpose of this translation seems to be to contextualise the text and make it available for social scientists, a bibliography for further critical reading would have been very useful.

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PURNIMA MANKEKAR, *Screening culture, viewing politics: An ethnology of television, womanhood and nation in postcolonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. xiii + 429 pp. Plates, notes, epilogue, bibliography, index. $19.95 (paperback).

This book raises a number of questions of critical importance for those who are interested in television and its audiences.

The author sets out to examine and critique the construction of family, womanhood, community and the nation in Doordarshan serials such as *Hum log, Rajani, Ramayan, Mahabharat, Udaan, Tamas* and *Paramveer chakra*. Telecast during what we may call the heyday of Doordarshan, the mid-1980s till the early 1990s, these serials, the author points out, were made and viewed at a time when television viewing in India expanded rapidly. This was also the period during which Hindu nationalism grew exponentially. The author begins by underscoring the importance of contests over 'culture' and points out that 'Doordarshan played a critical role in recasting and redeployment of the very notion of culture' (p. 11). The ethnographic research, conducted in two lower-middle-class neighbourhoods in New Delhi, aims to 'represent women's narratives and practices as *enactments* of their interpellation of television's discourses' (p. 23, original emphasis). These narratives and practices are mediated by 'gendered locations along axes of class, ethnicity, generation, and life experience, and by specific interpellations, positionalities, and agendas' (p. 23). The aim of the author's ethnography is to 'highlight the materiality of interpretative practices: women's responses to Doordarshan discourses had concrete implications for how they made sense of their lives' (p. 23). One chapter each is devoted to television's construction of the viewing family, 'New Indian Woman', national community, the

interpretation of Draupadi's 'disrobing' in *Mahabharat*, the gender implications of militaristic nationalism and Partition violence In every chapter, the discussion of television programmes is juxtaposed with the responses of viewers, directors and script writers and the analysis of these responses. The book ends with an epilogue on the developments in Indian television after the arrival of satellite television.

The book is disappointing on many counts. The attempt to situate viewers' interpretation of television serials in a range of undoubtedly relevant contexts leads the author to discussions of the political and historical contexts, history of Doordarshan, theories of popular culture and its circulation, debates on nationalism and feminism in India, etc. While the discussion of current scholarship has its uses, the author's contribution to these debates is minimal. On the other hand, with remarkable disingenuity Mankekar patents arguments which have been in circulation for some time now when she makes statements such as: 'I have argued that with the establishment of the nation-state, women were to be constituted as citizen-subjects who would participate in the task of nation building. In order for this to occur, they had to be unyoked from those aspects of "tradition" that potentially impeded the nation's predestined march toward modernity' (p. 156).

If the discussion of the framing contexts of television and its viewing (what Mankekar calls *conjunctural* ethnography) is disappointing, the examination of television throws up a series of observations which are valid for other media (such as cinema, radio, print) as well. For instance, the formulation that Doordarshan constructed 'viewing subjects as modern citizens' (p. 59). Did Indian cinemas construct non-modern or anti-modern or 'traditional' subjects? Setting out to investigate 'how Doordarshan was able to recruit and interpellate subjects as viewers through specific televisual modes of address, narrative techniques and forms of pleasure', the author attempts to analyse the specificity of television. the place of advertising, the opening and closing sections of episodes, framing of the image, etc. However, she often collapses the distinction between television epics and pre-television versions. For example: 'When I asked her what she liked most about Sita, Sushmita Dasgupta, who was unmarried and in her early thirties, replied. .' (p. 213). Is this a response to the serial? Did Ms. Dasgupta have an opinion on Sita prior to watching the serial?

Regrettably, we are not offered any information on the totality of television programmes of this period. Not a single daily/weekly schedule of television is to be found in the book. With the exception of a few lines on the frequency of film viewing of certain viewers, there is no discussion whatsoever on the other media in the lives of these viewers.

A question this book begs is the *need* for ethnographic studies of viewers, since the 'findings' are neither radical nor particularly insightful to anyone familiar with earlier studies in this area. For example, 'Doordarshan programs often provided a discursive space in which women would talk to each other and me about their positions within their families.' In the light of existing studies on

television, this is one of the first things one expects, not discovers The section on *bhakti* (Chapter 4), produced by the author as a major contribution to the debates on secularism in India, is an outstanding example of the book's tendency to present banal conclusions as profound revelations. Although the viewers say interesting things about their responses to *Ramayan*, the author invokes the concept of *bhakti* (which is presumably a way of coming to grips with everyday religiosity—something secularists have ignored for too long) and concludes, 'we need to expand our understanding of the reception of popular texts such as the *Ramayan* by acknowledging the power of faith, as a structure of feeling, in the interpellation of viewers as subjects of mass media' (p. 204). To say the least, this analysis fails to explain or even begin to ask interesting questions about the long history of mass-mediated devotion in India.

The tendency to sentimentalise the viewers, under the pretext of underscoring the *materiality* of the viewing experience, is exasperating, to put it mildly. For example: '"We were so relieved when they didn't ask for anything [dowry]. We would have been ruined if they had" (*hum to bik jate*). She bent her head to her embroidery and repeated the last phrase several times, the needle and thread flying through her fingers, "We would have been ruined. I thank God they didn't ask for anything. We would have been ruined"' (p. 87).

Finally, the book is repetitive and therefore unnecessarily long. Surely there is no need to inform the reader on three different occasions that in India individual (as opposed to shared) toilets are a luxury.

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AMIYA P. SEN, *Swami Vivekananda*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000. viii + 109 pp. References, glossary. Rs. 195 (hardback).

Amiya P. Sen is a historian. Yet, his book on Vivekananda—a brilliant intellectual biography consisting of seven meaningful chapters—arouses one's sociological imagination. Sen knows that it is impossible to study this 'multi-layered personality' without understanding his 'ambiguities and shifting positions on various issues'. Indeed, this slim book, written with sufficient rigour and imagination, helps us make sense of these divergent possibilities in Vivekananda. For example, Sen makes us wonder why Vivekananda, 'a product of a modern university', could come near Ramakrishna, 'an illiterate Brahmin who often spoke in rustic parables'. Or, as Sen has demonstrated beautifully, in Vivekananda one could see the presence of two contrasting qualities: 'a heroism and strong masculinity, on the one hand, quiescence and child-like surrender on the other'. Likewise, despite his religiosity, Vivekananda was an activist who sought to alter the destiny of the subaltern masses. This led him to plead for 'practical Vedanta'; he could inspire the emergent socialists working among women and the lower castes. But then, as Sen wants us to remember, all these radical pronouncements notwithstanding, Vivekananda's notion of womanhood was not free from the

dualities and stereotypes implicit in a patriarchal social order. Despite his plea for the 'sudra revolution', he would not agree to dissolve the institution of caste. Sen's book enables the reader to rediscover yet another 'renaissance man' who contributed tremendously to the making of modern India.

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RONALD J. TERCHEK, *Gandhi: Struggling for autonomy*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2000. xiv + 264 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, glossary, index. Rs. 245 (paperback).

A check on what the on-line bookselling service Amazon.com had to offer on Mahatma Gandhi in the summer of 2000 showed up a rounded figure of one hundred titles. Visits to two major bookstores in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. revealed that Gandhi's autobiography was the only book by an Indian that was in stock in the biography section. Some books on Gandhi were also available (Louis Fischer, Judith Brown). What is it that readers in the West find in Gandhi that fascinates them and persuades them to sustain a demand for Gandhi books? One answer is that political theorists have evinced keen interest in Gandhi. The Cambridge University Press published *Hind Swaraj* (edited by Canadian political scientist Anthony J. Parel) in 1997 under the series 'Cambridge texts in modern politics'. The same year, Oxford University Press published Bhikhu Parekh's *Gandhi*; his authoritative *Gandhi's political philosophy* had come out eight years earlier. And now we have the book under review.

Gandhi's critique of western modernity and the industrial civilisation would of course find echoes in many circles around the world, but that alone would not be enough to explain the appeal of Gandhi. Parel put his finger on the crucial point, namely, that 'Pessimism is never normative to *Hind Swaraj*; on the contrary, the book is hopeful that the advent of a moral revolution would still be a possibility' (p. xlv). (See my review of the Parel edition in *Contributions to Indian sociology* 33, 1&2: 435f., 1999.)

Likewise, Terchek, after pointing out why Gandhi's ideas may appeal to Indians, asserts that he 'develops a comprehensive theory that cuts across national boundaries about the worth of everyone, about the basic contours of the good society, and the importance of non-violence' (p. ix). More pointedly, he focuses on the 'struggle for autonomy' as the key element, for, according to him, Gandhi was deeply conscious of the threatening pervasiveness of power, not only the power of the state (represented in a particularly repressive form by colonialism), but also the more generalised power that inheres in civil society (experienced by millions of Indians as caste-based discrimination, exploitation and humiliation). The struggle for autonomy in Gandhi's view was 'continually necessary because the autonomy of men and women is always liable to be undermined anytime and anywhere, and such efforts need to be resisted' (p. x). In Terchek's judgement the foregoing insight is responsible for the continued relevance of Gandhi's thought.

Terchek points out that Gandhi's views on modernity are widely seen as anachronistic: the metaphors of the future that are today being increasingly shared globally are the very antithesis of all that he regarded as true and valuable. So much so indeed that 'Gandhi's walk into the twenty-first century may be a lonely one' (p. 234). To unravel the secret of Gandhi's mysterious ability to hold forth ideas that 'speak to the late modern world', one must not take his written and spoken word literally, for these were at the most manifest level time- and space-bound. A hermeneutic approach is essential to uncover the latent meanings and significances. Once this is adopted, Gandhi's holism stands out, and his integral vision illuminates the predicament of humanity today. At the core of this predicament lies the pervasiveness of power and the concomitant violence, and therefore the inevitability of struggle to end the fragmentation of human experience and the alienation that is the lot of men and women everywhere (see pp. 229–38). Terchek writes:

> Autonomy stands at the center of Gandhi's political philosophy. It is his greatest good and precedes in importance his other political and social goals. He sees individuals carrying a moral project that is related to who they are. As such, Gandhi claims, they not only deserve the freedom to pursue their moral projects honestly but they have the duty do so (p. 21).

In other words, to be whole one must be autonomous, but autonomy is inseparable from responsibility. Both conditions—autonomy and responsibility—are to be realised by the individual-in-society, through this-worldly praxis. Gandhi's individualism is communitarian but without the community being (or being allowed to be) suppressive of the individual. 'Gandhi's autonomous persons, wanting to govern themselves, resist any source of domination, whether in a corrupted tradition or in the modern world.... The human beings that Gandhi surveys are choice-makers' (p. 42).

Terchek elaborates these (and other) core ideas through a number of chapter-essays, discussing the reclamation of tradition (Chapter 2), the critique of modernity (Chapter 3), civil society in relation to modernisation (Chapter 4), Gandhi's politics (Chapter 5) and the challenging of violence (Chapter 6). Each chapter is marked by an intensive and sympathetic reading of what Gandhi spoke and wrote. Qualifications and reservations too are presented, but the primary message that Terchek has for his readers is that Gandhi's views about politics and society are radical in character and of enduring relevance.

Understandably, the chapter on politics is of crucial importance. (Terchek is a professor of government and politics in the University of Maryland in the USA.) Gandhi's conception of politics as 'one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life' (p. 139) is highlighted. Power is pervasive and even unavoidable, but it must be confronted everywhere, in government and in civil society. Civil disobedience is Gandhi's principal instrument in this endeavour, and then there is the overarching value of 'love' with which

power can be diffused. In terms of action, love translates into service. He urges participatory and decentralised modes of politics (p. 151). In the final analysis, Gandhi insisted that 'political life must be an echo of private life' and that 'there cannot be any divorce between the two' (p. 161)

The exploration of the primary sources on which this book is based is very impressive. Terchek is not, however, someone who is so deeply immersed in Gandhian texts that he sees nothing else. An outstanding feature of this book is that the author looks beyond the familiar names that come up in discussions of Gandhi's ideas such as Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy. It is refreshing to have Gandhi's ideas examined alongside those of Hannah Arendt (on labour and science), St. Augustine (on power), John Locke (on toleration), Machiavelli (on power), Nietzsche (on modernity and on the idolisation of the state), Tocqueville (on civil disobedience and on modernity), and Max Weber (on modernity). Among Indian thinkers Aurobindo, Nirmal Bose, Rajni Kothari and Ashis Nandy are cited. In a brief but most unexpected comparison, Gandhi and Antigone (in Sophocles's tragedy) are considered together, to conclude: Gandhi 'would admire Antigone's courageous affirmation, her allegiance to a higher law, and her refusal to be governed by fear. However, Gandhi would find her position troublesome. She does not know how to deliberate or love' (p. 198).

I have often wondered what Weber would have made of Gandhi, particularly in view of his interest in Tolstoy In his celebrated essay/address, 'Politics as a vocation', Weber regarded violence as 'the distinctive means for politics', an idea that Gandhi strove to reject. He also stressed the importance of responsibility and proportion in politics and observed that these considerations are not usually in consonance with an ethic of ultimate ends. He, however, concluded that it is only in a person in whom 'an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of resposibility' are 'in unison' that we find 'a genuine man—a man who *can* have the "calling of politics"'. Was Gandhi not such a genuine man?

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BARRY BARNES, *Understanding agency. Social theory and responsible action.* London: Sage Publications, 2000. xii + 163 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. £14 99 (paperback).

In contrast to the current trend of individualism and its allegedly close link with 'agency', the author of this book is keen at every turn to emphasise that for sociological theory the crucial characteristic of human beings is their 'collective agency', not their individual agency. Barnes divides the book into two parts. In the first part he examines voluntaristic concepts like 'agency' and 'choice' in the context of everyday life and as elements of social theory. Repudiating the individualism in social theory, Barnes puts forward various arguments asserting that voluntarism is better understood when individuals are seen as interdependent social agents coordinating their actions and cognition though interaction. It is in

the second part that Barnes explores the utility of such conceptualisation for an understanding of social life on a large scale. Here he focuses on the macro-sociological theories pointing out their teleological character and failure to recognise collective agency. Reflecting on the causal explanations of biological naturalistic theories, Barnes maintains that, like social scientists, biologists and geneticists too have failed to understand our social life properly. The book acquires an added value when it turns to the debate over the conceptualisation of 'individuals' and their capacity for 'agency' in moral and political philosophy

Barnes's work is remarkable in its attempt to transcend previously held dualisms like causal versus voluntaristic explanations, and to advance a model of social action that can contribute to a possible resolution of the problematic relation between 'structure' and 'agency'.

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Of related interest

CULTURE, SPACE AND THE NATION-STATE
FROM SENTIMENT TO STRUCTURE

DIPANKAR GUPTA

This unusual book extends the concerns of anthropology beyond the study of village life, rituals and caste observances to include considerations of the nation-state. Dipankar Gupta employs the analytical frameworks of the concept of culture combined with practical examples from everyday life to interpret governance, citizenship and fraternity. He concludes that ostensibly political institutions in fact have deep cultural roots. Professor Gupta argues that the significance of culture lies in the fact that it informs the way people interact with each other in defined spaces. The nation-state being one such space, it should therefore be seen as an important cultural phenomenon and not merely as lineaments on a map. Only when the nation-state is understood as a cultural phenomenon can the passion it rouses be better understood.

The book is divided into two parts; the first is based on the premises that only in a defined space can there be a clear conception of cultural membership. This conceptualization is then extended to include cultural membership of a nation-state and the territorial space such membership connotes. Part One concludes that as within a nation-state there are bound to be strong sentiments of identity, they are best understood as cultural phenomena. However, these sentiments need to be buttressed by structures of governance which bring people together by keeping alive the principles of citizenship and fraternity. Part Two uses examples from daily life to examine the phenomena of citizenship, civil society, fraternity, reservation and protecting minorities in the light of the above conceptualization.

With its unique approach to the study of the nation-state and its strong analytical and theoretical base, this book will be of immense interest to sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and those in the fields of cultural studies and the study of social systems.

CONTENTS: *Preface* • From Sentiment • Introduction: Culture, Space and Social Membership/Space, Non-Space and Site: Root Metaphor and Lex/Root Metaphor and Regnant Sets of Meanings/Space, Territory and Nation-State • To Structure • Society or the State: What Happened to Citizenship?/Fraternity, Citizenship and Affirmative Action: Recasting Reservation in the Language of Rights/Positive Discrimination and the Question of Fraternity: Rawls and the Communitarians/Minoritization and the Public Sphere/*References and Select Bibliography/Index/About the Author*

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Low caste but middle-class: Some religious strategies for middle-class identification in Hyderabad

Minna Säävälä

This article examines some religious means that socio-economically mobile low caste families use to identify themselves as 'middle-class people' in an urban setting in the south Indian city of Hyderabad. Special attention is paid to the situation of ex-Untouchables whose religious strategies, through partly specific to them, nevertheless reveal tendencies that are general among low caste Hindus in urban areas. The portrait of an ex-Untouchable family in Hyderabad and the arrangement of the ritual of Sri Satya Narayana vratam illuminates the Hindu religious strategies that they consider pivotal in the acquisition of social respectability. Although low caste middle-class people share certain of the cultural conceptions of the wider Indian (and Hindu) scene, they interpret ritualistic Hinduism in a non-hegemonic frame, emphasising features that may differ radically from the ideologically dominant version of cultural competence. The article shows that new middle-class people seek to create a 'middle-class Hinduism' devoid of caste, and focussed on auspiciousness, rather than purity and pollution.

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The cultural identification[1] of urban low caste families who have managed to gain economic security remains contradictory. At face value they share their way of life with middle-class families of higher caste background. Many, especially those of ex-Untouchable identity, nevertheless feel a need, at times desperate, to hide their social background and to avoid being exposed and recognised through their *jaati*. This article examines some religious means that socio-economically mobile low caste families use to identify themselves as 'middle-class people' in an urban setting in the south Indian city of Hyderabad. It looks at the problem of middle-class identification from the vantage point of new religiosity, understood as a socio-political phenomenon. Here, the transcendental and spiritual role of religion is left in the background and special attention paid to the situation of ex-Untouchables whose religious strategies, although partly specific to them, nevertheless reveal some general tendencies common to all low-caste Hindus in urban areas. The portrait of an ex-Untouchable family struggling in the lower fringes of a middle-class way of life illuminates the strategies related to Hindu religious practices that they consider pivotal in the acquisition of social respectability in an urban milieu. I argue that the concept of Sanskritisation is insufficient to account for these emerging processes. Low caste, and especially ex-Untouchable, middle-class people interpret ritualistic Hinduism in a non-hegemonic, subaltern frame which does not necessarily coincide either with political extremism of the Hindu nationalist type, or with the casteist interpretation of Hinduism.

The question of the middle-class simultaneously concerns identities and social structures. In this essay, I concentrate on looking at the problem of the 'new middle-class' from the perspective of these people's process of identification and ways of building a coherent social existence. I suggest that the overarching objective of social action for upwardly mobile low caste families is cultural re-interpretation of respectability, so as to render membership of a lowly *jaati* irrelevant for social honour. Studying the social life and identity of the new middle-class reveals a great deal about the problems of subalternity in contemporary India, providing a privileged vantage from which to consider the wider social changes that Indian society and caste relations are undergoing in the globalising world.

[1] Here I prefer the concept of 'identification' to 'identity', which has the air of being the fixed outcome of a process. 'Identification' is a cognitive and emotional process that people are endlessly engaged in, and it may be more problematic and controversial for some actors than for others. I derive the use of the concept from de Swaan (1995, 1997).

I
A problematic process of identification

There have been very few empirical studies of the 'new middle-class', defined here as those middle-class people who originate from lower caste[2] backgrounds and whose relative economic security is of a recent origin. We do not even know the proportion of low caste people who should be categorised as middle-class. For example, according to an all-India survey, around 10 per cent of the Scheduled Caste population could be considered middle-class people.[3] In the following discussion I will pay special attention to new middle-class people of ex-Untouchable origin. They present an extreme case of the caste–class nexus. Though other low caste people do not suffer the same degree of stigma, I claim that all low caste groups who have achieved economic mobility avail themselves of the same social and religious dynamics. The attitude of *jaati* identification in public is less complex among so-called Other Backward Castes (OBC) groups, but the need to define *jaati* identity as secondary for social respectability is shared by all lower caste people.[4]

There are some interesting studies of economically successful ex-Untouchable families. For instance, Mallick (1997) presents the family history of an elite SC family whose forefather was the first Indian of Untouchable origin to join the colonial Bengal Civil Service at the beginning of the 20th century. This family is better described as an elite rather than a middle-class family, but many of the difficulties they had faced in building up a coherent identity are akin to those of the new middle-class people as well. The most striking feature of this elite family's history was their need to hide or nullify their *jaati* identity. In this they were remarkably successful, even managing to forge marriage alliances without revealing their Scheduled Caste identity. This was made possible by the adoption of English as their mother tongue, and by their migration within India and to Western countries for

[2] I include in this term those whose *jaati* is defined officially as belonging to Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, or whose identity as such raises debate.

[3] In 1996 the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) conducted an all-India sample survey of nearly 9,500 citizens, of whom some 20 per cent were considered middle class by the researchers (Sheth 1999a, 1999b). Around 10 per cent of Dalits in the same sample are middle class (Sheth 1999a: 355).

[4] This is despite the fact that some caste associations among OBCs have become active social actors. The situation in northern India may differ from southern India.

education and elite careers. Some of the children and spouses were never told about the SC background of their parents or spouses. Mallick's material is extraordinary, given the sensitivity of the topic and city people's unwillingness to discuss or even reveal their identity as ex-Untouchables.

Studies of the identification of middle-class SCs remark on their notions of inferiority, feelings of loss, disorientation, and rejection. For instance, Patil (2000: 78) concludes his study of Mahar middle-class identity with the comment that the dalit middle class are neither accepted by higher caste Hindus nor by their own community. The conclusions of other observers of SC middle-class people are similarly pessimistic (e.g., Isaacs 1965; Mallick 1997; Ram 1988). Middle-class SCs are seen as experiencing status anxiety, feeling inferior when comparing themselves to middle-class people of higher caste backgrounds yet not feeling at home among their poorer *jaati* fellows either. The same problems, although in less extreme form, are expected to account for the situation of other low caste Hindus who have managed to gain middle-class status.

Such analyses are problematic in that they tend to see society in terms of fixed structures into which people must fit themselves. However, not only are ex-Untouchables and other low caste Hindus changing their positions in the scales (cf. Karanth and Charsley 1998: 293), but scales and categories are formed and transformed through strategising human action. It is thus misleading to simply conclude that middle-class people of low caste origin experience unrelenting feelings of inferiority and disorientation. Now that new middle-class people are numerous enough to form a socially meaningful entity, they are creating new interpretations of class and caste, and creating new categories of identification. Thus, even if the cultural identification of the new middle-class people *is* ambivalent (in the sense that they have to face questions concerning their identity which higher caste people might not), their situation is not necessarily as bleak and hopelessly problematic as we are led to believe. This ambivalence partly explains why most middle-class SC people do their best to conceal their *jaati* in interaction with non-SCs. The tendency to conceal identity and 'pass' should nevertheless not close our eyes to other strategies of identity-formation that are adopted by middle-class SCs. Their strategies are not only negative and inactive ones, that is, of *not* being revealed and *not* being identified, but also active ones, aimed at creating a new type of identity.

II
Growing interest in the Hindu religion?

The role of the Hindu religion in the lives of low caste people has negative associations for most activists, and for many scholars as well (e.g., Ilaiah 1996). Not traditionally regarded as proper Hindus, the growing tendency towards a Hindu identification, especially among dalits, is regarded as reactionary. Recent violence towards Christian missionaries who work mainly among dalits and tribal peoples has made the question politically controversial. The roots of the problem extend far back into the British colonial period. In 1910, the arithmetic of parliamentary representation had led Hindu leaders to insist that the 'Outcastes' should be categorised as Hindus, although higher caste informants had earlier objected to such recording (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 27–28).

Some researchers, such as Bhambhri (1999), consider the importance dalit *jaatis* have recently started to place on the Hindu religion as retrogressive:

> ...the positive developments of dalit consciousness have been negated by the emergence of the renewed appeal of Hinduism to every caste group in India.... Hindu religion has provided a holdall platform to all the dalit castes to operate in the overall structure of inegalitarian-ritualised Hindu belief system.

In such a view it is impossible to imagine the co-existence of dalit consciousness and the practice of the Hindu religion, for the stigma of Untouchability is seen as an essential part of the package of Hinduism. Behind this is a kind of Dumontian thinking, although with the opposite moral evaluation, in which Hinduism is defined solely by the binary opposition of the impure Untouchable and the pure Brahman. Before drawing such moralistic and hasty conclusions, we should first consider the purposes for which, and how, dalits use Hindu practices, if they use them at all.

Religious revivalism among the middle-class, which can be considered a form of reenchantment typical of the modern condition, is usually associated with Hindu political nationalism. The urban lower middle-class population, especially women, are said to be inclined to such populist ideologies: they 'are quick to find in religious politics the black-and-white certainties of faith and familiarity' (Varma 1998: 143) in the midst of rapid social change. There has been a long intellectual

history since the 1930s of claiming that the 'lower' or 'marginal' middle-classes constitute the social base of fascist and reactionary right-wing movements, and the theory of lower middle-class 'status panic' is still a favourite explanation of such political movements around the world (Burris 1995: 47). However, serious historical research on the rise of National Socialism in Germany, for example, provides no support to such a view. In fact, the 'old', proprietary and professional middle-class supported the Nazis far more fervently than the 'new' middle-class of white-collar workers. While the lower middle-class has served as a convenient scapegoat for both the political left and the right (ibid.: 35–46) this social category has not attracted serious sociological or anthropological research, remaining a source of discontent and fear among both the higher middle-class and the labour movement.

A survey of the voting patterns in the 1999 parliamentary elections shows that attributing the rise of Hindu nationalism to the new lower middle-class is not altogether accurate. In the elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies were especially favoured by the higher echelons of society, both in terms of class and caste. For example, a considerable proportion of middle or upper-class SCs tend to vote for the BJP or its allies, while poorer SCs rarely do so. However, the percentage of supporters of the BJP and its allies among middle-class SCs was 17 per cent—less than half of the proportion among economically equally successful upper caste Hindus (44 per cent) (Yadav, Kumar and Heath 1999). Another intriguing observation in the same survey was that, among Hindus, religiosity (measured by the regularity of worship) has very little relationship to voting preferences. The results of this CSDS survey show that the relationship between Hindu nationalism, religious revivalism, and caste affiliation is not at all straightforward. Hindu nationalism of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-BJP type is not necessarily a concomitant of growing Hindu religiosity. Hindu religiosity may be a *necessary*, but it is certainly not a *sufficient*, condition for support to the BJP.

III
Sanskritising or not?

In analyses of social change in India, two partly opposing tendencies are invoked. Sometimes changes are understood primarily as the outcome of Sanskritisation—that is, the cultural emulation of the (Brahmanic) practices of dominant *jaatis*—and sometimes as secularisation (e.g., Sheth 1999a, 1999b) or Westernisation (e.g., Srinivas 1992 [1966]). *Jaatis* of

ex-Untouchable origin are in a peculiar position here as they cannot truly Sanskritise in the full sense of the term. That is, those outside the four varna categories cannot legitimately 'climb' into them (so long as varnas are interpreted in the Brahmanical or vedic ways), although such claims were made by Srinivas himself later in his career (1996: xiv–xv), pointing out that in their case it embodies a strong element of protest against the higher castes. Here Srinivas has evidently broadened and diluted the definition of Sanskritisation to the extent that it simply becomes equivalent to formal imitation.

The majority of Untouchables who have not 'converted' to Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, do claim to be Hindus, although there may be intriguing patterns in the situatedness and variability of claims to Hindu identity (Khare 1998: 24). The motivation for identifying as a Hindu is more pronounced in urban than in rural areas. Urban dalits commonly prefer to hide their *jaati* from strangers, while being Christian or Buddhist, for example, is commonly interpreted as equivalent to being dalit (or tribal). If we regard the forms of worship as the source of defining a *jaati* as Hindu or non-Hindu, the lower *jaati*s are to a large extent in the same situation as ex-Untouchables, especially in rural south India. Lower castes and ex-Untouchables commonly share the village goddess and forms of worshipping her at the core of their religion. Adopting certain Sanskritic deities is as new for some urban low *jaati*s as it is for ex-Untouchables.

The question of the relation of middle-class SCs to Hindu religious practices is especially intriguing. Having traditionally been denied the opportunity of practising many of the caste Hindu rituals and even of hearing the veda, their embracing Hindu practices is a complex issue. How does this articulate with the claimed secularising tendency of the middle-classes, who are turning their interest towards earthly considerations ('only money matters')? My intention is to show that it is insufficient to interpret the growing interest that new middle-class families show in Hindu practices simply as a form of Sanskritisation (in the sense Srinivas originally gave to the term). The meaning given to the rituals does not imply agreement with hierarchical, caste Hinduism. Rather, it is understood as a challenge, a showing of cultural competence in which the lower castes seek to outdo the higher ones in propriety and piety. Vincentnathan (1993) has pointed out the centrality of being respected by others and having self-respect as being major concerns among the rural Untouchables she had studied in Tamil Nadu (see also Khare 1998: 176–88). What seems common to the way ex-Untouchables view hierarchy, equality and social

value, is the inherent potential for improvement in all people and an utterly egalitarian concept of person (Parish 1996: 41–65; Vincentnathan 1993). Thus it is not enough to note the formal practice or non-practice of certain Hindu rituals by a certain group. We also need a cultural analysis of the meanings and social processes embedded in those practices.

It is a widely observed social tendency that in stratified societies social mobility, honour, and prestige are derived from emulating the cultural practices of those above. This is a commonplace that forms the beginning, but only the beginning, in understanding social dynamics or cultural reality in any society. It is intriguing to see what practices are emulated and what not, and what the social corollaries of this emulation are. Commenting on religious emulation among lower middle-class people in the United States, Bensman and Vidich (1995: 255) aptly remark:

> Because the emulator is not fully cognizant of what it is he is emulating, he frequently caricatures his models and in so doing creates a new style. But the drama of emulation also affects the emulated, who views with anxiety the too-perfect competition of the emulator. Thus both the emulated and the emulator add new dimensions to existing life-styles.

The practices of the dominant are not frozen in time but may, as Bourdieu has shown in his analysis of French society (1979), transform so that the hierarchically lower ones will never 'reach' their social superiors at the level of cultural distinction. Thus the improvement of rank may be a fallacy—those above have already escaped beyond the cultural horizon.

According to Srinivas (1992 [1966]: 118), secularisation is more marked among the educated and urban groups, and Sanskritisation among the lower castes and tribes (the same claim is also made by Dumont 1972 [1970]: 239). In this light, the new educated and urban but low caste middle-class would face a dilemma concerning their cultural strategies for gaining prestige—whether to become utterly 'modern' or to adopt traditionally prestigious practices embedded in notions of purity. However, categorising social change into a dichotomy between Sanskritisation (which comes close to being 'traditional') and Westernisation/Secularisation (which comes close to 'modern') is questionable in the present situation, where urban people in India (as elsewhere) use and interpret 'traditions' consciously and deploy them for political ends. The concepts of Sanskritisation and secularisation do not

much help in understanding the action of a Brahman IT-engineer who goes to Sabarimalai together with low caste pilgrims as *Aiyyappa swami*. Present-day religiosity has taken a form which cannot be categorised by concepts that take the division between tradition and modernity as unproblematic.

Some analysts (e.g., Sheth 1999b) have shunned the importance of religious and ritual factors in the formation of the new middle-class. Sheth claims that the membership of the middle-class is formed solely on the basis of consumerist and educational factors, and that rituality has lost its relevance for the formation of class. In my opinion, he misses an important and intriguing feature—the growing importance of religion for middle-class people generally (see, e.g., Varma 1998: 137–45).[5] Sheth (1999b) connects Hindu religion and caste too tightly together. If the importance of caste is waning, he concludes that the importance of religious practice must also be waning, a judgement which misses the point that the meaning of religion and rituality is dynamic, and not fixed. Middle-class families of low caste background are creating new interpretations of Hindu religion, which do not involve or necessitate caste divisions. Their actions are in some sense akin to the Bhakti and Viirashaiva movements of earlier centuries, but they also 'destroy' the Brahmanism of Sanskritic ritual with its own weapons, so to say. As Karanth (1996: 94) has put it, 'emulation may really be defiance'. In the following case study of a Hyderabadi ex-Untouchable family in the lower fringes of middle-class identity, my intention is to show that emulation may be defiance, but it is defiance in culturally meaningful terms.

IV
A family on the fringes of middle-class identity

Hyderabad is the fast-growing capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Within 20 years, the city has grown from a sleepy provincial town into

[5] Srinivas (1992 [1966]: 145–46) himself noted numerous examples of religious revivalism. In a chapter titled 'Secularization', he wrote:

> Hinduism is becoming increasingly, though very slowly, dissociated from its traditional social structure of caste, kinship, and village community, and is becoming associated with the state, political parties, and organisations promoting Indian culture. Traditional institutions such as monasteries and temples, cults and saints, *bhajan* groups and pilgrimages have shown resilience and adaptability to new circumstances.

However, these perceptive observations failed to affect his theoretical concepts and considerations.

a five-million-people hub of the growing IT industry, nicknamed Cyberabad by the press. Hyderabad has a long history as a Muslim dominated city, but the majority of the population is Hindu. Great numbers of people have migrated to the city, both from the relatively wealthier coastal Andhra region and from the poorer Telangana region that surrounds Hyderabad. The main *jaatis*—or *kulams*[6] as they are most commonly called in Telugu (the native tongue of the majority of Hindus in Hyderabad)—that are categorised as Scheduled Castes in AP, are Malas and Madigas, who are approximately equal in number.

In what follows, we will concentrate on a Mala family, called here 'Urmila's family' after one of the daughters who was my research assistant and thus my 'gate' to the family. Urmila's mother had migrated to Hyderabad as a child, together with her parents; the father went there as an adult. They have a considerable number of relatives living in the city. This nuclear family is struggling to improve its position and be acknowledged as a middle-class family, thus far in vain. The father has a permanent job as a caretaker in a government hostel. Despite being a 'blue-collar worker', he enjoys a permanent job in the public sector, which renders their social position much better than other labourers. Urmila's mother is a housewife, mostly engaged in looking after their four water-buffaloes, in addition to household work. They have three unmarried daughters. The eldest has a bachelor's degree in engineering but remains unemployed; Urmila, the middle daughter, works as a salesgirl; and the youngest is a college student. They live in a *bastii* where the majority of the families are Malas. There are also some hierarchically higher Hindu *jaatis* and a considerable number of Muslim families in the neighbourhood.

New middle-class people in Hyderabad, whom I met during my fieldwork period, categorised social honour and economic well-being in the following way: first, there are the poor people (*peedasaadaalu, biidawaaLLu*), who survive from their immediate earnings and who live in slum areas without running water, where they struggle vainly against muck and mire. Second, the middle-class (*madhyataragati*; middle grade, set, rank, class, form) is centrally identified through negation; being neither poor, nor belonging to the third group, the elite (*goppawaallu*, lit. great people).[7] Being in the middle is a vague social

[6] Italicised words in Telugu follow the transcription model supplied by Krishnamurti and Gwynn (1985).

[7] Similar categorisations are found, e.g., in Kanpur (Froystad 1999) and Jaipur (Peace 1984: 278).

categorisation that reflects an economic differentiation, but is not directly derived from it. The poor are, as the word suggests, those who lack economic means and are labourers. It is practically impossible to be defined by others as 'middle-class' without a certain level of economic means, no matter how educated one is or of how high a caste background. In order to be part of the middle-class, a family has to be able to live in a *pukka* house in a neighbourhood where most other people are regarded as middle-class as well. However, people do not define middle-class simply as an outcome of economic well-being; it is also defined on the basis of respectability, certain visible signs, such as cleanliness, neat way of dressing, healthy appearance (i.e., plumpness, shiny black hair; the question of fair skin is more complicated), courteous manners and the ability to speak English (which derives from formal, private education). It is possible to have a lot of money without being middle-class, if the family is unable to turn economic capital into cultural capital through education and the adoption of these visible signs.[8]

Such definitions of the middle-class always reflect the social position of the person her/himself. For a Hyderabadi Parsi woman of the old elite, the importance of money for respectability was contradictory. This frugal and self-sufficient woman, who did not employ even a single servant despite her considerable wealth, said that seeing some of the new rich in their fancy cars in the city streets, she feels that 'their uncivilised ways are an insult to the car they are sitting in'. For Urmila, money was essential, but not as important as respectful behaviour (*maanam, mariyaada*). She felt nauseated seeing rich young boys and girls of her own age flocking around a shopping centre in their tight jeans and revealing tops. Respectability does not come down to the possession of economic means, although money is essential for the cultivation of respectability. To understand the significance of certain religious practices (i.e., practices related to serving God) in new middle-class people's lives, we have to look into certain cultural concepts (auspiciousness, the evil eye, manipulating good fortune) in relation to urbanity and consumption tendencies.

New middle-class families consider that money and means should be directed to those things which enhance respectability (*maanam, mariyaada*). Religious observances are an important aspect of deriving distinction from monetary means. Wealthy and established middle-class people in turn tend to stress the role of money for social value, and

[8] This is most obviously the case in rural areas where many well-to-do peasants would not be considered as middle-class by themselves or by others.

construct the world as a frame within which money helps you to do anything you want without being restricted by moral considerations. An example is Sheila, a beautician who owns a beauty parlour, employing a male dance teacher to teach her teenage daughter and leaving the two by themselves in the apartment; this would have been unheard of in any Mala middle-class family of my acquaintance. Sheila, however, saw nothing wrong in it, commenting that this is what city life is nowadays like—there is no need to keep up appearances. The lower middle-class interpretation of respectability seems much more closely tied to notions, of piety and honour than is the case among established middle-class people, for whom money is a means of loosening the definitions of family honour. Urmila's mother has decided that once their financial situation improves permanently, she would use the first 5,000 rupees to build a tomb for her late father's remains. She considers it a great sin that they are now lying in an earthen jar in the open, without being given due respect.

Urmila's family is socially positioned on the upper fringes of the *biidawaaLLu*, 'poor people', struggling for recognition as middle-class. Economically they find it hard to establish a middle-class way of life. For one thing, they cannot afford to move out of the *bastii*. Where they suffer from lack of water and electricity. Consequently the mother (and the youngest daughter) have to struggle hard to keep the family clean, well-fed and dressed in proper clothes, sometimes unsuccessfully. Urmila's late maternal grandfather had helped to finance the education of the daughters, who appear as middle-class girls when moving around in the city. This is especially the case for the two daughters who went to an English-medium school, and even more so for Urmila, whose complexion is fairer than the others.

It is common for middle-class Malas either to lie concerning their *jaati*, when they meet up with strangers or become acquainted with new people, or to give the impression that they are of some higher group. For example, Urmila had advised her Brahman friend to let her employer to-be (a show-room owner) believe that she, too, was a Brahman because otherwise she would not have been employed at all. So far the truth about her *jaati* has not been revealed, although being constantly on guard and avoiding certain topics requires vigilance. For example, when Urmila once thoughtlessly told her co-salesgirls that her mother had cooked mutton curry the day before, she had some explaining to do. A number of little, revealing signs has probably given Urmila away to her employer who, however, has no reason to sack an ardent worker.

The fact that Untouchable *jaatis* struggle to pass as 'Touchables' proves that discrimination still exists. However, in stressing the practices directed to concealing their *jaati*, we may easily overlook *other* strategies that are used to gain recognition as middle-class people. 'Erasing Untouchability' is problematic for the first generation of children whose parents have attained middle-class status, since people from a low caste background tend to be recognised from their skin pigmentation and general habitus. It is impossible to pass as an upper caste person if one's complexion is very dark, if one is short-statured or if one acts and speaks in a deferential manner in front of people who appear to be wealthy and/or of a higher caste background. Bleaching facials and fairness creams offer only a partial solution to the problem of dark skin pigmentation. A factor that makes skin colour particularly important in Hyderabad is that, being on the borderline between northern and southern influences, the population is very diverse in complexion, with both very fair as well as very dark people. Deeper in the south the question might not be so significant, thanks to the presence of middle and higher-caste people of relatively dark skin pigmentation, but in Hyderabad, examples of fair complexion are constantly visible as a source of comparison.

The most important factor in passing as a middle-class family is the choice of residence. Living in a *bastii* makes it very difficult to be respected by other middle-class people because no matter how much the women toil, keeping clothes and bodies clean and tidy tends to be difficult. Traces remain in *bastii* dwellers' embodied habitus, betraying their class background. It is also difficult, if not impossible, to invite unrelated middle-class people to visit a *bastii*. Living in a neighbourhood where most people are poor is considered a problem by upwardly mobile lower caste people. This not only reflects their aspirations for a better life, but unease about the poorer neighbours, with whom sharing and reciprocity becomes unbalanced and problematic. Feelings of jealousy tend to increase. These tensions are central to Urmila's family's everyday life, especially for the mother, who spends most of her time around the house, tending the water-buffaloes.

The unhappy economic situation of the family accounted for the fact that they could not move out of the *bastii*. However, even for a lower caste family with means to pay a regular rent, it is not easy to rent a house in a middle-class area. This was evident when Urmila's cousins tried to rent a room for the daughters and myself in a middle-class neighbourhood: dark skin, a way of speaking, and general habitus revealed their background

as lowly to potential landlords. When we finally managed to rent a room, Urmila's uncle, who lives in the same neighbourhood, advised them to conceal their *jaati* because the landlord would have thrown them out had he known that he was accommodating Untouchables under his roof. This was evidently one of the motivations behind Urmila and her sisters carrying out a Laxmi *puuja* in the room every Friday, with all pomp and display. Neighbours could not escape hearing and smelling what was going on. Thus, they gave a clear impression of being pious Hindus (which they also were). In their weekly Laxmi *puujas*, the social logic was somewhat different from that of the Satya Narayana *wratam*, to be described in more detail below.

V
Religiosity

Although my initial intention during the fieldwork was to pay attention to the significance of money, not religion, the importance of Hindu religious practices to those middle-class families with whom I became acquainted attracted my immediate interest. This does not mean that religious strategies for mobility would be more intrinsic to urban Indians than other strategies, such as those related to housing, social networks, and education. However, religion as a social phenomenon can nowhere be considered separate from political and social forces, and in India it plays a specific role in the context of caste relations.

Among Hyderabadi new middle-class families, going to temples and on pilgrimages, and engaging in *puujas*, were common affairs. Various rituals were arranged at home with the help of *puujaaris*, and religious festivals celebrated reverentially. The new kind of interest that middle-class Hindu families pay to practising religion, observed in all Indian cities, was evident in Hyderabad as well. Religious rituals were mostly carried out at home by women, with men being scarcely involved. For example, Laxmi, Urmila's classificatory sister-in-law, usually conducted *puuja* at home three times a week. These elaborate *puujas* were *wratams*, or vows, intended to enhance the health and well-being of her husband and the family. A *puuja* which started at sunrise concluded only by 11 o'clock. Part of the *puuja* was *upawaasam*, a fast. She would not eat or drink anything before the *puuja* ended, and would have a rice meal that day only after sunset; cooking non-vegetarian meals for others in the house was impossible. This relatively well-to-do family lived in a lower middle-class neighbourhood in their own house. Laxmi's husband, a

B.A. in engineering, was employed as a supervisor in a private company where he earned relatively well.[9]

Laxmi was the most ardent *puuja*-maker I have ever met with in India, either in rural or in urban areas,[10] so ardent that even relatives eager to carry out rituals themselves at times regarded her *puujas* as excessive. At the same time, women relatives respected her for her piety. In addition to the Tuesday *puuja* for Anjaneyudu (Hanuman), Friday *puuja* for Laxmi and Saturday *puuja* for Venkateshwara, Laxmi was in the habit of visiting temples. She kept the house extremely neat, washing the floors every day and dusting the sofas and shelves (they did not employ any servants). The practice of complex *puujas* and fasts is a recent innovation, and not part of the Mala tradition. Laxmi's mother-in-law, a sturdy village woman from the Telangana region, lives with the family, but does not practise *puujas*. She nevertheless honours Laxmi's religious fervour and silently observes her activities, following the instructions given by Laxmi (for example, not to touch her before the *puuja* and during it, nor enter the kitchen when she is engaged in *puuja*, to preserve *maDi*, ritual purity). Thus we are here speaking of a kind of re-invention of religiosity—a religiosity that does not derive directly from cultural tradition, but is created by the actor who has become conscious of her/his cultural identity. In such a situation, religiosity gains a new social meaning.

VI

Sri Satya Narayana Swami wratam – *'The True Lord Narayana vow'*

Malas whom I knew tended to stress devotionalism and a direct relation to God in the practice of the Hindu religion. Here we can see that they follow the lead of Bhakti movements—interpreting Hinduism in a way that overrides caste—although they do not participate in any clearly-defined religious movement. What is new is the way that this devotionalism is linked with material well-being and success in the modern, urban world. Ritual observances and devotion to God are seen as essential for gaining high marks in education, attaining good jobs, becoming wealthy and preserving wealth—in short, for checking inauspiciousness (*abham*, *ashubham*). A good example of this is the

[9] He was the only educated Mala with whom I was acquainted who worked in the private sector.

[10] I carried out 14 months of fieldwork in rural Andhra Pradesh in 1993–94 (see Saavala 2001).

Sri Satya Narayana Swami *wratam*, a ritual that Urmila's family organised during my fieldwork in Hyderabad.

I had a special opportunity to observe this ritual, traditionally a prerogative of caste Hindus, but nowadays practised by many urban SCs (those able to afford it) as well. Every caste Hindu couple in Andhra Pradesh is advised to arrange this ritual after their marriage, to consolidate their union and enhance the well-being of the entire family. Not everyone organises it, whether for economic or practical reasons. Urmila's parents had never had the money to arrange the *puuja*, although they had already been married for 30 years. The ritual requires considerable expense: compensating the *puujaari* for his services, buying a long list of necessities for the *puuja*, buying new clothes for all family members, and feeding all the guests. Now they have the money.

Narayana is an incarnation of Vishnu, the Preserver, who is very popular in Andhra Pradesh.[11] The name derives from the Sanskrit word meaning 'resting on the waters' or 'the original, eternal man' (Flood 1996: 120). The ritual is described by calling it either a *wratam* (a vow to undertake religious obligations or perform a ceremony) or *katha* (story, narrative). For short, it was often referred to as a *puuja*, *puuja* being a general word meaning worship and sacrifice. Translated into English, the ritual is something like 'The true lord Narayana story' or 'The true lord Narayana vow'.

Urmila's mother explained that the ritual celebrates the marital bond and brings good fortune to the couple, removing all inauspicious influences from them. The form of the ritual derives from a marriage ceremony. The main difference is that the *puujaari* narrates three or five long mythical stories or tales of Satya Narayana's deeds (*harikatha*), a recital absent in marriage ceremonies. All relatives, as well as neighbours, are supposed to be invited to the ceremony, and a vegetarian meal is served to them. The whole house has to be washed from top to bottom, all bed linen and clothes laundered, and walls preferably painted or whitewashed. A priest chooses a suitable day by consulting the Hindu calendar, and no female member of the household should be menstruating during the ceremonies. (As there were five mature women in the household, it was not easy to rule out the possibility of someone menstruating.) Household members are supposed to wear new clothes for the day. The ritual is like a new beginning for the family, which is reflected in washing everything and using new clothes, and in the contents of the ritual offerings to the deity.

[11] Other forms of Vishnu are also worshipped in Andhra Pradesh, for example, Venkateshwara, whose abode in Tirupati is the wealthiest temple in India.

Urmila's family decided to organise the ritual, which they had long wished to arrange, now that they had received some extra money (thanks to Urmila being employed by me and being paid well).[12]

The arrangements necessary for the *wratam* excited the daughters of the family as well as their mother. The reactions of the father remained more opaque, and both before the ceremony and during it (where he was to take the central role together with his wife), I sensed bafflement in his behaviour. The women of the neighbouring houses were eager to know how the preparations were advancing, peeping in constantly to see what the decorations were like and how the cleaning of the house was progressing. The neighbours seemed to appreciate that Urmila's family was to arrange the *wratam* and anticipated it eagerly. The *puuja* brought prestige for their modest *bastii*. We naturally do not know how they reacted in the absence of Urmila's family. Knowing the tensions in the neighbourhood (to be discussed shortly), we could expect that the way Urmila's family went about the arrangements would also have attracted critical comments. Muslim neighbours with whom Urmila's family was on good terms (Urmila's father's best friends were Muslims) did not disapprove either, though they naturally kept their distance during the preparations and the *wratam*. Urmila mentioned the *puuja* to her friends only later, once it was over. Most of their relatives remained unaware of the *puuja* until the previous day (for reasons that will be explained). The urban milieu was central for the arrangement of the *puuja*. In this context, the *jaati* identity of a family is known only by neighbours, while the impression created by the *puuja* results in a prestigious image among a wider social circle. As Malas have traditionally not staged the Satya Narayana *wratam* in rural areas,[13] the ritual helps urban Mala families to pass as non-ex-Untouchables. However, in my interpretation of the ritual, we see that projecting a social image to those on the fringes of social networks is not the central motivation of the *puuja*; instead, the main interest lies in playing to the close social circle.

[12] Although the initiative and wish to arrange the Satya Narayana *wratam* was not originally my idea, my presence made it possible for it to take place then. Since I have known the family since 1994 and lived with them for several periods, it is difficult to think that they would try to keep up religious appearances in front of me. However, we have to be aware of the fact that my influence in the arrangement of the *wratam* is unquestionable, even if not decisive.

[13] In rural areas, it would be practically impossible to find a priest to act as *puujaari* for a Mala family for this ritual, and higher castes would probably protest against the arrangement.

The day for the *wratam* was chosen according to the *puujari's* consultations. The *puujari* was a Brahman of low status who had presided over the family's rituals for decades. He had chosen the day and compiled a long list of the necessary paraphernalia. Several hundred rupees were spent on various kinds of flowers and banana plants, mango leaves, piles of coconuts, bananas, betel leaves and betel nuts, incense, oil for lamps, kumkum and turmeric powder, and sweets of various kinds. The daughters spent the morning of the *puuja* day in decorating the courtyard and a low wooden altar, borrowed from a friend's family, with yellow and white flowers and banana stems. The ceremony was supposed to start at 10 a.m. but the *puujaari*, as well as relatives, only came after noon. The *puujaari*, who arrived on a scooter, was dressed in the traditional white cotton lungi and kurta and a purple shoulder cloth. He issued some instructions on the preparation of the altar and hurried the daughters to finish the decorations so that the ritual could start.

First, all the women relatives gathered around Urmila's parents in the little room where the family usually dined. The altar was at the centre of the room, full of colours and smells. The room, which did not have a fan, became hotter with every minute of the ritual, but despite the heat and congestion, everyone was in a good mood. Women packed themselves in to sit on the floor with their little babies, while the men mostly stayed outside. Finally, the *puujaari* started the ritual in a high-pitched voice. He had Urmila's parents sit in front of the altar, following a routine similar to a marriage ceremony: lighting incense sticks, throwing rice, breaking coconuts, repeating mantras, and so on. Urmila's parents seemed to be very intensely concentrated on the proceedings.

After half an hour, it was time for the *harikatha*, which everyone regarded as the best part of the ritual. The three stories were very long and recited by the priest in such fast Telugu that they were difficult to follow. In the middle and following each story, all the women heartily joined in singing praises to Satya Narayana. After the story-telling, Urmila's parents sat down to receive gifts from Urmila's *maamas'* wives and, after them, from other women who gave coconut halves placed on betel leaves. (These little sets had been prepared earlier and placed on a bowl of yellow rice.) The women worshipped the couple by bowing down before them and touching their feet. Then it was the time for the delivery of *prasaadam*, a sweet drink made of fruit, buttermilk, jaggery, and coconut water that had been prepared during the ceremony by some women relatives and that was now consecrated by the priest. Finally everyone joined in the vegetarian meal, which consisted of bean curry, sambar stew and pulao rice, cooked by Urmila's father. During the meal

and after it the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly. People chatted and children played, and everyone could eat as much as they liked.

Central to the ceremony is the giving of gifts—to the lord Narayana (ritual gifts of coconuts and other fruits, flowers, sweets, incense etc.), to the *puujaari* (money, coconuts and rice), to the couple (sweets, clothes and clothing material, rice, fruit, money) and to the neighbours and relatives attending. The role of the gift-giving is vital in understanding why this Mala family was so eager to arrange the ritual and why they saw it as a source of well-being. Giving unreciprocated, 'pure' gifts (*daan;* Telugu *daanam*) can be interpreted as a way of averting or annulling inauspiciousness and bad fortune (Parry 1986, 1989, 1991; Raheja 1988). Although the dynamics of arranging the *wratam* are closely related to social strategies, we can understand the social dynamics of the *wratam* only in relation to cultural conceptions and ways of constructing meaning. Concepts such as auspiciousness and *daan* are created in social relations, and are simultaneously essential for understanding social relations, including those in new urban situations.

Thus the Sri Satya Narayana *wratam* performed by Urmila's family had its primary motivation not in emulation or mimicking of the habits of the hierarchically higher, but in manoeuvring with auspiciousness through the giving of *daanam* and the distributing of *prasaadam*. Hindus have an ambivalent attitude towards receiving gifts: the receiver can be structurally construed as being of inferior status to the donor, and in some contexts and regions, the pure gift is seen as carrying within it negative characteristics such as the the donor's personal sins (e.g., Parry 1986, 1989) or inauspiciousness (Raheja 1988).[14] Untouchables as well as South Indian service castes just above Untouchables[15] have traditionally been the recipients of gifts from their patrons, to whom they used to be tied in patron–client relations. They were to receive gifts and compensate for them in the form of services, allegiance, and deference. Untouchables were never to give to anyone outside their caste. As ideal-typical receivers, they could not rid themselves of the inauspiciousness and sin that thus accumulated, as they were unable to adopt a truly reciprocal relationship with the givers. They were regarded as not only polluted, but also inauspicious.[16] It is still a common belief in

[14] This pan-Indian interpretation of the pure gift is contested by many sch (e.g , Fuller 1984; Madan 1991: 293; Östor and Fruzzetti 1991: 313-15).

[15] In southern India, unlike in northern India, service *jaatis* such as Barbers and Washermen are not considered Untouchables.

[16] See Carman and Marglin (1985) and Das (1982) for analyses of auspiciousness/ inauspiciousness versus purity/pollution.

Andhra villages (for example, the village in which I did fieldwork in 1994–95 [see Säävälä 2001]), that the presence of Untouchables is not only polluting but also inauspicious, and the Untouchables themselves believed that they suffered from many ailments such as miscarriages, witchcraft and poor health due to their untouchability (see also Khare 1998: 156). Inauspiciousness (as well as magical power) is especially attributed to Untouchable females.[17]

When Urmila was explaining their motivation in arranging the ritual, it is significant that she was speaking mainly about serving food to neighbours and relatives. They could have had the *puuja* arranged in a temple at some distance, going there with a few people in the morning and returning the next day. This would have helped them cut down the cost, but they preferred at arrange it at home because their dwelling would thus be blessed as the site of the sacrifice to Satya Narayana, and they could serve a meal to a large number of people. Urmila and her mother considered it very important to offer food to the people of the neighbourhood and involve them in the proceedings. As Urmila explained: 'Everybody's eyes are on us. The *puuja* helps us to get rid of that influence, helps things to happen.'

Several fundamental features of their lives are crystallised in Urmila's comment. Urmila's family faced many difficulties, a root cause being the fact that, since they had three daughters and no sons, they faced serious problems with dowries. The parents had struggled to educate the girls and give them a better chance in life, but as they were relatively poor, it was difficult to marry them off to educated grooms from families of high status. That is why none of them was yet married, though the eldest daughter was already 28 years old. The father had lost a small plot of land he inherited in his natal village to his step-brother, and the mother had likewise lost her inheritance to her brothers who were unwilling to help the family, despite being well settled, with permanent government jobs and fine houses in a middle-class neighbourhood. Though the eldest daughter had successfully completed an engineering degree, the family had also not managed to secure a job for her. All their attempts at getting a reserved job in the public sector had been in vain; either the jobs were 'sold' to people who paid higher bribes, or some other hindrance blocked their way. They considered a government job the only acceptable option for the daughter, and discounted the possibility of

[17] It is in this light that the central importance for Mala women of controlling the feminine principle through their ardent participation in *puujas* becomes intelligible, the more so in this family of four females and one male.

her being employed in the private sector. In their opinion, discrimination in the private sector would be worse, and positions insecure. The family felt that there was bad luck hanging over them, so no matter how much they struggled, studied and worked, they were unable to realise their aspirations. This is why, as Urmila put it, the *wratam* would 'help things happen' and 'free' them for success.

Since Urmila's maternal grandfather had been a relatively well-to-do man[18] who attached great importance to educating his grandchildren in good schools, Urmila and her elder sister had gone to an English-medium private school. Yet Urmila's family felt that because the daughters were not married, neighbours and relatives despised them. Moreover, such people disapproved of Urmila working outside her home and bringing her salary back to her parents—in the general opinion, the parents should have provided for the daughters. Many of their successful relatives had moved out of the *bastii*; Urmila's family was in-between, doing better than some of their remaining relatives in the *bastii*, but not well enough to afford moving elsewhere. This meant that some neighbours and relatives were jealous of them, while others, the better-off, looked down upon them. Some better-off relatives were not even willing to visit them in the *bastii*, which created resentment. Some successful relatives who visited the house expressed their disapproval of Urmila's family through little hints, such as paying attention to the absence of a toilet, the low voltage which slowed the movement of the fans, etc. Urmila's family felt socially trapped in the *bastii*, while dreaming of a better future that they felt to be almost within reach. By arranging the *puuja* they could both appease those who were jealous and/or critical, and demonstrate their aspirations to those 'above them'. The *wratam* would remove other people's harmful glances, *cedugu diSTi*.

Another reason why they eager to arrange the *puuja* was to involve certain relatives: Urmila's *maamas* (mother's brothers) and their wives, who had grabbed the mother's share of the ancestral land. They hoped to engage these relatives in solving the problems that they faced. *Maamas* are expected to show special interest in their sister's children, but both *maamas* had concentrated on accumulating wealth for themselves and explicitly denied help to Urmila's family, provoking constant quarrels. As Urmila's father had no siblings and most other relatives either lived in the countryside or were poor, Urmila's family had only the mother's side to turn to in their problems. At times, frustrated by

[18] When he had migrated to Hyderabad he had, on foresight, purchased some plots of land in the margins of the city, and his wealth increased later when the city grew.

their 'selfishness', Urmila's mother decided to abstain from all social interaction with her mother and the *maamas*' families; at times she was eager to re-create the ties. There was clear tension between maternal and paternal ties. Although the legitimate support for the family should have come from the father's side, in practice the mother's side was the only potential source of economic and social assistance for social mobility. It was nevertheless difficult to pressure the *maamas*.

Now, Urmila's mother wanted to teach them a lesson: the family did not want to tell the *maamas* about the ritual in advance, but did so only the previous evening. In this way the *maamas* would be unable to force Urmila's maternal grandmother, who lived with them, to hand over her pension to buy all the gifts that they were expected to bring to their sister's ritual. (According to Urmila, they were in the habit of cashing the pension and using it for their own expenses). Thus they were forced to spend their own money on the gifts. Urmila's family evidently intended to dishonour the *maamas*' wives in the eyes of the neighbours and other relatives by leaving them too little time to prepare properly for their obligatory gift-giving. When the *maamas* and their families arrived for the ritual, they appeared both jolly and simultaneously somewhat embarrassed and irritated by the fact that they had been given so little time to prepare. The *maamas*' wives nevertheless carried out their ritual duties with dignity, and no sharp comments were exchanged. When Urmila passed comments on the poor performance of the *maamas*' wives to a classificatory sister-in-law, this respected senior relative tempered her criticism by pointing out that they had been given inadequate time to prepare themselves. Urmila's family put the *maamas* in a difficult position, but they did not provoke a quarrel. Nor did they manage to tarnish their honour seriously in the eyes of others, who were naturally aware of the complicated relationship between Urmila's parents and the *maamas*.

The fact that Urmila's family considered receiving gifts from the *maamas*' wives one of the important features of the ritual shows that the dynamics of ritual gift-giving cannot be summed up simply as the passing on of evil influences through giving *daanam*. If that was the case, Urmila's parents would hardly have been eager to receive gifts from those relatives. The annihilation of inauspiciousness from their lives required both the receiving and giving of gifts; the aim was to strengthen and renew cosmological relations with God, and social ties to relatives and neighbours.

Let us now return to Urmila's comment: 'Everybody's eyes are on us; the *puuja* will help things happen.' Less attention was paid to the strictly ritualistic side of the occasion, it being more important to engage relatives and neighbours in the ceremony. The festive ritual became an

occasion to receive everyone's glances, but to render them harmless, even beneficial, for their future success. In the case of Urmila's family, the logic was that giving gifts would pass on the harmful glances (*diSTi*), which they had attracted by acting in socially dubious ways (educating their daughters and delaying their marriages, making Urmila earn for the family, and enjoying the attention and help of a supposedly rich foreigner (the anthropologist). Hierarchical notions of purity and pollution were evident in some aspects of the *puuja* arrangement. For instance, it had to take place when no woman of the household was menstruating, and the whole house had to be cleaned in advance. However, these purity considerations were merely instrumental, and overshadowed by the need to manoeuvre with auspiciousness. The aim was not to release the couple and the family from impurity, but to create an auspicious ambience for future success. In other words, the primary motivation for arranging the ritual was not to prove to people of higher caste that they were religious minded, proper Hindus, as we might be led to believe by the notion of Sanskritisation. In fact, Urmila avoided talking about the ritual with some of her higher caste friends, because she felt they would ridicule her enthusiasm and find her family's religiosity embarrassing. Arranging the ritual is not primarily communication directed to higher castes to 'woo' their acceptance, but first and foremost a gesture towards relatives and the members of their own caste group and neighbourhood.[19] It was interesting that, encouraged by Urmila's family, another Mala family in the *bastii* arranged the same Satya Narayana *wratam* two weeks later. They employed a Sanskritic priest, a Brahman, from a nearby temple, unlike Urmila's family who patronised a low-prestige Brahman who had served their family in the city for decades. However, the women of the neighbourhood were disappointed with the Sanskritic temple priest's performance, because he narrated the *harikatha* in a Sanskritic form of Telugu that they were unable to follow.

VII
Conclusion

At a cultural level, middle-class Malas, just like all low caste people, share certain cultural categorisations within the wider Indian (and Hindu) scene. However, the emphases they place on particular features may

[19] Partly, it was also a question of stressing their Hindu identity in the eyes of Muslim neighbours.

differ radically from the ideologically dominant version of cultural competence. As Parish (1996: 55) has put it:

> Low caste actors do not live in a self-contained 'culture' of their own, entirely apart from high caste culture, nor do they seamlessly share a 'culture' with high caste actors. Rather, they struggle to know themselves in terms of a double encounter: they encounter the difference between their constructions of self and the way high caste actors stigmatise them; they respond creatively to this by juxtaposing and orchestrating cultural perspectives and thus attempt to encounter high caste 'culture' on their own terms.

The interpretation of Sri Satya Narayana *wratam*—and many other religious rituals as well—as primarily concerned with notions of auspiciousness and the gift, giving ideas of purity and pollution an instrumental rather than fundamental role, is a good example of low caste middle-class people's attempts to embrace high caste 'culture' on their own terms. Though they have adopted rituals which have traditionally been denied them, they do not aim to mimic Brahmanic practices, but give them their own interpretation derived from shared cultural resources and categories.

The great importance that many very low caste families accord to worshipping Hindu gods is not a manifestation of simple emulation, that is, of Sanskritisation as a form of social distinction. Nor is it a matter of hegemonic incorporation. By worshipping gods and engaging themselves in ritual gift-giving they aspire, among other things, to rid themselves of the inauspiciousness which has traditionally been their lot as Untouchables at the dead-end of gift-exchange networks. Moreover, ritual gift-giving is a way of manipulating social tensions in an altogether new, urban situation—in the heterogenisation of social class in a caste society. The family in question aspired to open up new avenues of auspiciousness, which would remove obstacles from their route to the middle-class proper by securing their children good government jobs, a house in middle-class surroundings, and marriages to prestigious and wealthy people.

The low caste middle-classes interpret Hinduism in such a way as to create for themselves a caste-less 'middle-class Hinduism' which they can partake of. This means that the concept of auspiciousness, not purity and pollution, is crucial to the ways they interpret Hinduism. The practice of Hindu rituals has become a feature descriptive of their middle-class identity, such that being middle-class is seen as a function of being Hindu. They are forging their new identity from scratch in the urban

environment, and in doing so, use culturally significant means. Religion, especially devotional religion, is a major way of accumulating feelings of self-worth in the city, as well as being utterly political, even if not directly Hindu nationalistic.

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Caste and the colonial state: Mallahs in the census

Smita Tewari Jassal

The central problematic of this essay, the process of caste identity formation, is explored here with a focus on the fishing and riverfaring group of castes, the Mallah or Nishad, of the Bhojpuri-speaking region in eastern UP and Bihar. The process is analysed with reference to different sources of information, both colonial and post-colonial, which include the census, the system of scheduling whereby the Mallah/Nishad was labelled as both a criminal tribe and a backward caste, and finally, through voices from within the community. The essay is concerned with both the emergence of the Nishad identity as a result of and in reaction to the interventions of the colonial state and with the effects of the latter on identity-formation in the post-colonial era.

I
Introduction

This essay explores some of the ways in which the caste identity of the Mallahs of the Bhojpuri-speaking region of eastern UP and Bihar was shaped in the first half of this century as a consequence of state interventions. These included census operations and the caste's response to the latter, as well as colonial attempts to define the caste, firstly, as 'backward' and 'unmanageable', and later as one of several 'criminal tribes'. Mallah efforts at sanskritisation, as well as attempts by different segments of the caste to claim an overarching Nishad identity, and the expectations of the colonial state on which these were grounded, are

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some of the themes explored here. The investigation assumes particular significance in the light of the recent debate on including caste returns in the census (Deshpande and Sundar 1998).

Fieldwork in selected villages of eastern UP and Bihar has established that Mallahs are closely linked with a range of caste groups (Kewat, Bind, Mallah, Tiyar, etc.) traditionally associated with water-based occupations such as fishing, river faring, water-based transportation, desilting wells, *singhara* (water-chestnut) farming, and so on. This occupational affinity, combined with a common geographical niche on the fringes of agrarian societies, has resulted in shared histories and pasts, and more recently, for political reasons, in the assumption of an overarching Mallah identity, submerging regional and caste differences. The term 'Nishad', a term which dates back to Vedic times and has its origins in classical Sanskrit texts, is used by informants interchangeably with Mallah.

The Mallah caste is identified in state discourse as one of the Most Backward (MB) among Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the region in terms of economic, social and political criteria (*Report* 1955: 34–37)[1] the top rungs of the OBC hierarchy being occupied by the Yadavas.[2] Pushed to the fringes of mainstream society, the Mallahs have been 'marginalised': economically, in terms of lack of access to productive resources and livelihood security; culturally, in terms of lack of access to education; and politically, through lack of political representation and political power. Among the cumulative disadvantages to which Mallahs have been subject is a lack of the technical or professional skills that are valued in the 'market'-oriented climate of today. In their own self-perception, the Mallahs' backwardness and marginalisation are largely a function of their lack of access to land and other productive resources. The caste has lost out in the post-Independence race for land and secure landholdings owing to a number of factors, including geographical isolation and their consequent inability to access economic and educational opportunities.

[1] 'Most Backward', an administrative rather than a sociological term, has been used in the state discourse to designate groups at the bottom of state lists comprising the 'Other Backward Classes', a nomenclature which itself had evolved to differentiate classes suffering from some form of backwardness from those listed as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

[2] Mallah informants suggest that, in addition to land, the Yadavas gained prosperity through: i) the lucrative supplementary occupation of dairying; ii) familiarity and interactions with the market which served as a register of trends and information; and iii) the hard work of the Yadava women.

Our focus in this paper is on obtaining insights into the historical roots of the current psychological, geographical and social dimensions of Mallah backwardness. Popularly termed *jal kisans*, Mallahs had been an integral part of the civilisations which evolved along riverbanks. Concentrated along the river Ganga, which was their source of livelihood, they are scattered throughout the vast Gangetic belt from Uttar Pradesh to Bengal and Assam. Their language, Bhojpuri, constructs a distinct socio-cultural contour for those who speak it, in a region stretching from Varanasi in eastern UP, to Hajipur in Bihar. This is the cultural region which constitutes the universe of the present enquiry.

Mallahs occupy the lower rungs of the highly heterogeneous section of Other Backward Classes comprising more than 45 caste groups in UP and more than 108 caste groups in Bihar, with the top rungs of the OBC hierarchy being occupied, as noted, by the Yadava and Kurmi agriculturist castes (*Report* 1955). During the course of the last century, the Mallahs have seen rapid socio-economic transformation and occupational diversification, moving from water-based livelihood patterns to settled agriculture and artisanal production. This transition is likely to have been a particularly difficult one, setting this caste apart from other marginalised castes among the Most Backward Castes.

At the time of the first census (1871), considerable occupational diversification had already taken place. Traditionally Mallahs were integrated into village economies and markets through cash and grain, particularly as transporters of goods and produce by boats. In zamindari areas, they were responsible for the payment of a tax, *jal kar*, to the zamindars whose patronage they enjoyed. In addition to fishing and boating, the range of services they made available to village communities included the desilting of village wells, and skill in growing seasonal vegetables along riverbanks. Owing to the decline in river transport after the construction of the Grand Trunk Road and the subsequent advent of the railways, the loss of fishing as a viable source of livelihood following the construction of the Farakka Barrage and government curbs on fishing in the Ganga, and ecological changes such as the drying up of village *talabs* and *pokhars* [ponds and lakes], which were rich sources of fish, a substantial section of the caste had taken to cultivation by the end of the 19th century, joining settled agricultural communities primarily as landless agricultural labourers. Some acquired marginal holdings, while a few worked as sharecroppers and tenants on the lower rungs of village caste hierarchies. The transition was far from smooth,

since historically the caste had by and large developed on the fringes of land-based systems.[3]

In some places such as the Varanasi district, Mallahs have taken to other occupations such as weaving. Along the river here, village settlements of former Mallah communities are entirely engaged in weaving. Thus, in addition to agriculture and animal husbandry, which have been fairly open, a number of relatively caste-free occupations attracted Mallahs. Supplementary sources of income adopted by the Mallahs include basket-making, and rope-making with *moonj* grass, at which Mallah women have been particularly skilled. In addition, a large proportion of Mallah males migrate, at least seasonally, to ply rickshaws in nearby cities. Mallah women are replacing Dalits as inexpensive agricultural labour, and are increasingly described as the neo-Dalits in the region. The implications of this occupational diversification for Mallah identity is an issue which requires further exploration.

II

The census and caste identities: The case of the Mallahs

By the mid-19th century it was believed that a powerful state could not survive without making enumeration a central technique of social control (Appadurai 1993: 317). Since caste appeared to be the key to Indian uniqueness and diversity, as well as to the Indian mentality, it soon emerged as the main category of social classification. By 1872, it was being argued that much of what needed to be known about the Indian population could be comprehended only by a detailed enumeration of the population in terms of caste (ibid.: 328). Along with surveys of land, information on health, disease, climate, crops and religion, caste data gradually became a means of understanding and controlling the population (Pant 1987: 147–49).

By the 1870s, in addition to the dependence on numbers, castes began to be treated as abstractable from their regional and socio-economic specificities to provide an overall grid for organising knowledge about the Indian population. Despite the enormous practical difficulties

[3] Parallel processes have occurred in other parts of the country, as described by Enthoven, a colonial scholar who studied the tribes and castes of western India. He recorded that it was common for families of the Koli or fisher caste to take up agriculture and become accepted as Kunbis within the local community, Kunbi being a generic term for those who work the land (Enthoven 1922: 247).

involved in the effort to construct an all-India table of named and enumerated 'castes', the principle continued in successive censuses until the 1930s. The hunt for data on caste led to a virtually unmanageable flow of information, beginning as early as the 1860s. Initially, only numerical majorities were given prominence in the census reports, and this emerged as the central principle for organising census information. Clearly the complex information-gathering enterprise of the colonial state was meant to serve significant purposes, which were both explanatory as well as disciplinary in nature. Apart from description, the census often transformed what it sought to describe, and in the process created identities where none had previously existed.

A feature of the colonial state's discourse on the structure of Indian society was a specific conceptualisation of caste, wherein theoretical questions of the nature of caste or principles of caste organisation were eclipsed by a perspective in which caste itself held a 'substantial' identity. The substantiality of caste was constituted by a name, number of members, physical characteristics, cultural practices, territory occupied—in short, by the range of information that had been collected through the innumerable surveys and the variety of informants. Castes appeared as relatively discrete communities whose members shared certain commonalities in the areas of worship, dress, occupation and relationships with each other on the basis of assigned ritual-political standing. The census surveys posed questions in ways which suggested that castes were homogeneous collectives, whose members could be physically counted, their practices explained and defined, and their behaviour predicted. 'Thus a particular administrative strategy evolved within which certain castes were designated as social groups about whom objective knowledge was possible and necessary' (Pant 1987: 150). The census, therefore, opened up a space for communities and castes to redefine themselves.

The range of boating and fishing communities of the Bhojpuri-speaking region, which forms the subject of the current enquiry, illustrates well the complexity and diversity of caste names which were often subsumed, partly by administrative design, under generic terms, in this case, 'Mallah' or 'Nishad'. The latter name appears to have been most widely and uniformly used by different segments of the caste to distinguish themselves from other caste groups and to express an occupational solidarity cutting across state and region. The term, as we shall see in a later section, expresses more than mere occupational distinctiveness: it evokes pride in an ancient and rich historical tradition and, as such,

was considered most acceptable as an overarching term during census operations when standardisation of caste names was sought.

In the United Provinces, the terms Kewat, Bansi, Chain, Jalehar, Kharsa, Majhi and Nishad were considered synonymous with Mallah, though some of these may signify subcaste or clan distinctions. In Bihar, further variations among subcastes were reflected in names such as Birhar, Gayotri, Ghatwal, Jalwer, Kurwaha, Maheta, Majhi, Muriyoni, Masuria, Phutant, Purhia, Nishad, Goshi and Jhiwar. Crooke, the colonial authority on the tribes and castes of north India, cited Mallah, Kewat, Dhimar, Kumbhiak or Jalak as related, and identified the subcastes as Chain, Dhuriya, Kewat, Kharebind, Nikhad and Surahiya. According to Crooke, there existed 625 subdivisions among Hindu Mallahs and 22 within the Muslim branch, the Tiyars of Ghazipur representing both Hindus and Muslims. In Mirzapur, the endogamous subcastes are identified as Muriya or Muriyari, Bathwa or Badhariya, Chai, Chain or Chaini, Goriya, Tiyar and Surahiya, Bind, Pandubi, Kulwat and Kewat (Crooke 1896).

Bhojpuri informants confirm the existence of eight distinct *kuris* or endogamous subcastes known as Bind, Banpar, Tiyar, Chain, Muriyari, Surahiya, Kewat and Majhi.[4] The focus of the current enquiry largely concerns these groups. It appears that Bind, Banpar and Tiyar have traditionally specialised in fishing; the latter four subcastes were engaged in river transportation and boating, a fact which enabled them to claim a higher status for themselves. In addition to their relatively 'clean' image vis-à-vis the fishing subcastes, river transportation also appears to have contributed to their greater and more visible economic prosperity, further justifying their claims to higher status.

Juggling caste names and hierarchies

With the colonial interest in census, the emerging sociological discourse relating to caste developed in two directions. While the census and ethnographic surveys were continuously generating information about caste, there was a parallel ordering exercise underway, which reorganised and reworked the data so produced. The latter exercise involved two processes: (a) the standardisation of names of castes and subcastes so that clearly demarcated categories could emerge; and (b) evolving a hierarchy of castes with an all-India applicability, as opposed to castes whose names altered across regions or with changes

[4] Interview with Shivprakash Chowdhary, village Lachhmanpur, Ara, April 1998.

in socio-political contexts (Pant 1987: 151). The effect was to squeeze castes into an artificial vertical line, where each caste occupied a position either higher or lower than every other (Quigley 1993: 115).

The standardisation and reduction of caste categories was necessitated by the requirements of preparing a uniform all-India caste classification, allowing for comparability across administrative spaces (Pant 1987: 155). As respondents were likely to return names as varied as titles, surnames, endogamous group names, occupational names, etc., the standardisation of caste names was informed by a considerable urgency of purpose (ibid.). The problem of overlapping terms was also partially resolved by creating caste hierarchies, separating higher from lower castes. Initially, the varna scheme with its all-India spread was found most suitable to classify the Hindu population and was adopted to organise first-order names and categories. While the upper castes were designated by a term denoting regional, ritual or lineage divisions, lower castes were referred to solely by their occupations, which seemed to suggest that it was the service, occupation or trade which comprised the sum total of the identity of lower castes (ibid.: 152–53).

While varna categories appeared suitable for classifying most castes, census administrators were soon disenchanted with the shudra varna, which appeared to subsume a wide range of non-twice-born castes. After 1872, those castes which were not twice-born were listed alongside Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas as 'Other Castes', or castes without subdivision. The bulk of the agriculturists were thus left out of the classification system. Subsequent generic usages in 1881 of 'Agricultural Castes' and 'Martial Races', while grouping classes important for the colonial regime, failed to find favour as representing the lower castes (ibid.: 155).

A lack of clarity about the shudra varna characterised the census operations and was to ultimately contribute to the skewing of census information and results largely in favour of the three superior varnas, whose population probably totalled less than 30 per cent. As untouchables typically constituted 10 per cent of the total population, the bulk of the population in most regions was shudra, or a mix of the two (Milner 1994: 46). However, unease with the shudra varna seems to have been further reinforced by the tendency of lower caste groups to deny their shudra status altogether and have themselves enumerated as twice-born in their efforts to claim higher status. Commenting on this phenomenon, Hutton explained in the 1931 Census,

> There is, however, a very marked repugnance in all the castes who have anything to say about the matter to being designated *sudras*, though the term seems to have been quite respectable up to a comparatively recent date.... The use of *varna*, however, is quite impossible since practically every Hindu who claims to be a Hindu at all would claim to be either Brahmin or Kshattriya. Even castes of Chamars in the United Provinces have dropped their characteristic nomenclature and at this census returned themselves as Sun- or Moon-descended Rajputs (Hutton 1933: I, 432).

Rather than shudra status, an emphasis on occupation as the most significant criterion for classifying the lower castes began to find favour over varna classification. This proved particularly problematic in view of the fact that many functional castes had abandoned their traditional occupations in several regions. In Bihar, for instance, four out of five Ahirs had given up their traditional occupation of dairying in favour of cultivation by 1901, and the Census reported that only one out of 20 followed the traditional caste occupation (Risley and Gait 1903, I, 1: 217). Similarly in the case of Chamars, only 7 per cent were returned as leatherworkers, while two out of three were shown as agriculturists and nearly one out of five as earthworkers and general labourers (ibid.). In 1911, amongst Mallahs of the United Provinces, only 11 per cent were reported to be following their traditional occupation of boating and fishing. The figure was even lower for the Kewats of Bihar (Gait 1913). Hence, listing the caste groups under the occupations of fishing and boating is unlikely to have done justice to the occupational diversity represented by these communities even in 1931.

Census Commissioner Nesfield's theory of the historical origins of caste to justify the primacy attached to occupational criteria was a good example of the materialist evolutionism that characterised the work of colonial ethnographers (Hutton 1933: 434). Nesfield's evolutionist views on the relation of caste ranking and industry appear to have dominated the colonial understanding of caste in the early 20th century (ibid.). The social hierarchy was explained by a historical scheme through which societies evolved from the hunting/fishing stage, through nomadism and cattle grazing to agriculture, followed by pre-metal crafts and industries (ibid.). In this schema, the fishing stage was deemed more highly evolved than the hunting stage because, through sedentarisation and exchanges, it was in closer and more regular contact with agricultural communities (ibid.). This is significant since, by

this logic, castes engaged in fishing were to be ranked higher in the hierarchy than the hunting and gathering communities, but lower than those castes or subcastes engaged in river transportation, which had a more advanced material culture and were integrated within commercial economies.

Thus at the bottom of the scale were aboriginal tribes such as Tharus, Kanjars, Doms and Nats. The position immediately above these was occupied by hunting, fishing and boating castes, i.e., Baheliyas, Mallahs and Dhimars. Then came pastoral Ahirs and Gadariyas as well as the mass of agriculturists. The artisan castes were subdivided with reference to the supposed priority of the evolution of their crafts. Thus basket-makers, weavers, oilmen, potters were considered more primitive than those using metals such as blacksmiths and goldsmiths. Above these were trading and serving castes (Hutton 1933). The United Provinces census list placed Mallahs under Class IX—'Castes from whom some of the Twice-born take water while others would not'. In the Bihar list, Bind, Chain, Kewat, Mallah and Tiyar, various denominations of fishing and boating castes, were categorised as Inferior Shudras in Class IV, but above the Class V category of Unclean Castes (ibid.: 566).

Caste mobility and the census

Risley's persistence in classifying castes in an unambiguous hierarchical scale actually generated endless petitions from people who recognised the census operations as one available avenue for social mobility (Quigley 1993: 109). It is interesting that despite the plethora of petitions which the hierarchising exercise provoked, Risley's successors did not bother to question the nature of the order they sought to impose, or ask whether castes really existed in the way that colonial administrators had imagined (ibid.). Obviously what was lost was an understanding of how castes were earlier ordered in relation to each other. Fuzziness about status, particularly among the middle ranging castes, had been an integral part of the structure of caste. Hence the emergence of disputes over relative status was an inevitable consequence of colonial preoccupation with the linear model of caste.

In the 1901 census, claims to higher status came mainly from individuals, rather than from caste associations, as was characteristic of later censuses. In this census, ascertainment of the numerical strength of castes appears to have been one of the primary objectives. Given that, traditionally, the king or government had been the ultimate arbiter or authority in upholding the caste order, an assumption prevailed in the

popular mind that the effect of the census record would be to fix the individual's position in the social scale (Edye 1923: 223).[5] However, while kings had rarely been in a position to disturb the caste order, except to incorporate tribal chieftains into the Kshatriya fold, the colonial census procedures unintentionally provided a chance to groups to redefine their social and political positions consistent with the existing inequalities between and within castes in the distribution of wealth, income, literacy and power.

In the three decades following the first census, claims to higher status moved from the individual to the collective level. By the 1920s, caste *sabhas* had emerged, which persistently pressed claims to higher status. These caste *sabhas* and assemblies focused on social reform measures in addition to developing political agendas to organise caste members under overarching umbrella terms to assert economic and political demands. Excepting the most backward castes and tribes, well-developed caste associations made representations to the Census Commissioner with requests for new caste names well after the tables had actually been printed. Caste *sabhas* applying to be recorded as higher in the order of precedence became a marker for the redefinition of communities. Involvement with processes of redefining community equipped people with a new language of politics. Here were sown the seeds for what came to be known as 'identity politics' in the modern era.

In the United Provinces, for instance, the Lohars (blacksmiths) and Barhais (carpenters) sought to be recorded as Panchal Brahmans; the Kahars (water carriers) as Kashyap Rajputs; the Lodhs as Lodhi Rajputs; the Koeris as Kushwaha Kshatriyas; the Nais as a subcaste of Brahmans; the Tambulis (betel leaf vendors) as Nagbansi Kshatriyas; the Kurmis as Kurmi-Kshatriyas; and the Chamars as Jatav Rajputs. Representations for inclusion in the three higher varnas came from hundreds of caste associations from different regions and districts of the province. Along with these petitions, lifestyle changes (which included prohibition on the consumption of liquor, the remarriage of widows and an emphasis on purity along with the adoption of higher caste rituals and education) were significant measures undertaken by a whole range of middle and lower castes. These efforts were noted and widely commented upon by most Census Commissioners, and in fact, later Census Commissioners measured the success of the experiment precisely in

[5] The Peshwa state as described by Uma Chakravarti (1998. 3–30) provides a good illustration of the popular expectation that the king's prime duty was the upholding of caste norms.

terms of the large number of petitions and memorials to which it gave rise (Turner 1933: 539).

Minimising the confusion such representations generated and keeping the enumeration record accurate proved challenging for the census bureaucracy (Turner 1933; Census United Provinces 1931: 528). The 1921 report claimed that, as the census had confined itself merely to recording the existing facts, it had to 'avoid the position of arbiter in questions of caste claims' (Edye 1923; Census 1921). In a way this was achieved by ensuring that 'in the first place no classification was attempted in the tables, caste names being arranged in alphabetical order' (Edye 1923: 223). According to Galanter:

> non-interference implied doing what rulers in India had always done—actively upholding and supporting the caste order. But it also implied aloof neutrality. The outcome was a changing patchwork of support and aloofness, threaded by impulses of reform given intermittent and reluctant expression, all bent and reshaped in unplanned ways by forces released by the British presence (Galanter 1984: 19).

In the Bhojpuri-speaking region, the Yadava movement is interesting as an extremely successful response to the opportunities provided by the census to upgrade caste status. The movement, which had a wide inter-regional spread, attempted to submerge regional names such as Goala, Ahir, Ahar, Gopa, etc., in favour of the generic term Yadava (Rao 1979). Hence a number of pastoralist castes were subsumed under Yadava, in accordance with decisions taken by the regional and national level caste *sabhas*. The caste's efforts matched those of census officials, for whom standardisation of overlapping names was a matter of policy. As a prominent agriculturist caste in the region, despite belonging to the shudra varna, the Yadavas claimed Kshatriya status tracing descent from the Yadu dynasty. The Yadavas became the first among the shudras to gain the right to wear the *janeu*, a case of successful sanskritisation which continues till date. The success of the Yadava movement also lies in the fact that, among the *jaati sabhas*, the Yadava *sabha* was probably the strongest, its journal, *Ahir Samachar*, having an all-India spread. These factors strengthened local efforts, such as in Bhojpur, where the Yadavas, locally known as Ahirs, refused to do *begari* or forced labour for the landlords and simultaneously prohibited liquor consumption, child marriages, and so on. Gait noted as early as 1911 that 'the Goalas of Bihar have resolved *inter alia* to give up infant marriage and to prevent their women from selling milk or going to market' (Gait 1913; *Report* 1955: 392).

Similar to the Yadava movement was the case of the Kalwars, a caste of liquor makers and dealers who decided to give up the sale, manufacture and consumption of alcohol and adopt a new identity to go with the new surname of Jaiswal. In keeping with their Kshatriya aspirations, caste members were urged to adopt prefixes and suffixes such as Kunwer, Thakur, Dhwaja and Singh.[6]

III
Sanskritisation efforts by Mallahs

Emulation of higher caste lifestyles either preceded or accompanied formal acts such as submission of census petitions. Indeed, such efforts at sanskritisation were invariably noted among the range of castes which applied to have themselves listed as higher in the caste hierarchy. These were usually collective decisions arrived at in caste associations.

Evidence of a different kind of attempt at upward mobility is provided by the case of the Tiyars, a subcaste of fisherfolk who attempted to give up fishing, arguing that supernatural sanctions prohibited the entire caste from continuing with their traditional occupation. Among several lower castes, such visions and dreams by caste leaders appear to have been commonplace in providing the rationale for mobilising caste opinion against unwanted practices. For instance, the Purnea Tiyars worshipped

[6] In this context a document entitled, 'An open letter to the Brahmans of Rajapuri', written by Ganga Prasad Jayaswal (1928) is of considerable interest. It describes a response by the Brahmans to the Kalwars' claims to wear the sacred thread. The Kalwars of Dumraon had asserted their right to wear the *janeu* on the grounds that it is prescribed for all Kshatriyas. Interestingly, in support of their right to do so, the Kalwars cited and invoked several Brahmanical texts which actually reinforce and legitimise Brahmanical authority. While the texts cited seem to reaffirm Brahman ritual superiority, in fact the letter may be read as calling Brahman superiority into question and subverting the edifice of caste hierarchy by asserting Kalwar claims to don the sacred thread.

The letter offers unique insight into another less-known dimension of the strivings for upward mobility of various castes, namely the reactions and responses of other castes. The letter mentions the atrocities perpetrated by the local Brahman community on the Kalwars who dared to wear the thread. It appears that *janeus* were forcibly snatched off and broken, the Kalwars were denied water from the village wells and the Nai (barber), Dhobi (washerman), Bhangi (sweeper) and Kahar (water carrier) were forced to deny services to them. At a mass sacred thread ceremony, the proceedings were disrupted by stone-pelting, the hurling of abuses and humiliation of guests, including Kalwar preachers and bhajan singers. Volunteers were roughed up and people prevented from using the fields for defecation. Clearly the Kalwars' attempt at sanskritisation did not go unchallenged, and the resistance of the upper castes to such attempts at upward mobility was marked by physical atrocities meted out to them

a deity called Prem Raja, a celebrated brigand of Tirhut. In 1864, one Bijua Tiyar reported that this Prem Raja had appeared to him in a vision and ordained that the Tiyars should cease to be fishermen, and instead devote themselves to religious rites to promote prosperity. The Census Commissioner reported that approximately 4,000 Tiyars from Ghazipur, Varanasi, and adjoining districts assembled at Gogra near Purnea, where they made offerings to an idol, and sacrificed some 3,000 goats. Another meeting was held soon after, but it was reported that this movement, which appeared to be a repetition of a similar one among the Dosadhs of Bihar in 1863, was shortlived and unsuccessful (Hutton 1933: 420).

By 1931, the census operations appeared to have become so immense that, while the caste or race of every person had to be recorded in the schedule for reasons of economy, not all the caste names returned could be tabulated individually (Turner 1933: XVIII, 533). To simplify things, different castes were clubbed together, particularly among depressed groups, on the belief that total figures would suffice for them. This probably accounts for the fact that the various subcastes did not find a mention, though Mallahs and Nishads were listed. All along, choices had to be made and a rationale provided for excluding certain groups and including others. While the term 'Nishad' was favoured by the concerned castes for its sanskritising potential, it was the census bureaucracy which ultimately determined which subcastes should be recorded independently, and which clubbed together. It appears that details and names of various castes which were lower down on the social scale could be sacrificed in the interests of standardisation and simplification. Here, too, colonial ideology was at work, selecting and dispensing with the information collected.

Sometimes the process of standardisation could lead to very skewed results. For instance in 1901, the Mallahs showed an abnormal increase of 38.9 per cent, over returns for 1891. Upon investigation, this increase was explained by the fact that, in previous censuses, they had been confused with Kahars and Kewats. The case is illustrative of the nature of the confusion which could arise from clubbing together castes that appeared to be dealing in similar substances (water, in this case). As water carriers, the Kahars were firmly integrated within village communities, while the terrain of the Kewats as boatmen had been rivers.

By the 1931 census, Mallahs were taking pride in claiming that they were a clean caste at whose hands upper castes would accept water, and at whose ceremonies Brahmans would officiate. As an occupational caste which had faced increasing marginalisation due to a shrinking resource base and lack of alternative economic opportunities, the group

of castes clubbed together under the term 'Nishad' uniformly placed themselves above the ritually polluting castes, citing in explanation historical texts that referred to Nishads as living on the outskirts of towns, injunctions on fisherfolk to live outside the city and Kautilya's labelling of mixed castes, including the Nishads, as shudra (Jha 1974: 77).[7]

The Mallah case also demonstrates that state enumeration procedures, as well as the castes' own efforts at reform and mobility, both tended to seek uniformity and overlook diversity, though for very different reasons. For the state, standardisation was necessary for simplification and the streamlining of bureaucratic and administrative procedures and processes, whereas for castes the rationale was unity through the forging of appealing and potent identities. In the following section we examine the origin myths which played a significant role in forging a distinct Nishad identity.

The origin of Nishad in *lok parampara*

Like other low caste groups, the Mallahs sought the chance to elevate their social status within an overarching Nishad identity by erasing and submerging the differences within caste groups, in this case between the fishing and boating castes, and by assuming occupational uniformity and respectability. As we have seen, the tendency to fuse castes into common *sabhas* identified by overarching terms such as Yadava, was becoming increasingly common. The appeal of the term 'Nishad' appears to derive from its mention both in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as an ancient, prosperous and powerful tribal state formation in the Vindhyas. In the Mahabharata, the forest tract bordering the lands of Vedic and non-Vedic peoples, a territory reputed for its wild predatory animals and elephants, robbers, and hermitages of ascetics, is described as being inhabited by the Nishadas. In this wild tract, the Nishada state represented the inhabited region, with Nala as the chief protector of the land's wealth, consisting of gold, chariots and apparel (Misra 1999: 62). The Ayodhya Kanda in the Ramayana, the most well known and revered text in the region, refers to the Nishad king Guha helping Ram across the Ganga, indicating the existence of a Nishad kingdom (Jha 1974: 74).

[7] Echoing the colonial discourse Vivekanand Jha writes:

> the treatment of the Nisadas as inferior sudras does not make a difference; for, as R S. Sharma maintains, the inferior sudras were demarcated from the ordinary sudras by their habitations, backward culture and primitive religious beliefs The Nisadas clearly belonged to those social segments, which were kept at a distance, perhaps segregated, and considered much lower in status than the general sudra population (Jha 1974: 77).

There are three types of beliefs about the origin of Nishad in *lok parampara* (folk tradition). In the first, the claim is of a universal and philosophical nature. The concern here is not determined by geographical/ national boundaries; instead it relates to the origin of the earth and its first inhabitants. Legends within this category claim that the Nishads were the first to inhabit the earth after a series of destructions. The Nishads' proximity to water and water-based livelihoods reinforces this claim. The fact that all ancient civilisations appeared and flourished on the banks of rivers is taken as further proof of the above. Among the earliest crafts of survival, fish hunting is believed to be the first. The notion of a community of fisherfolk in this discourse is extended to include the Nile, Euphrates, Indus, etc.

Panini, the author of the *Ashtadhayayi*, is remembered by the community as having interpreted the word 'Nishad', which is derived from Nishad (whole, all-encompassing), as Brahma, the one who is everywhere. Thus, just as Brahma is found in all creation, Nishads too are everywhere. According to another variation, Nishad is derived from *nish* ('to flow'), since Nishads earn their living by rowing boats on rivers. Yet another version interprets Nishad as joining the two meanings *nish* (darkness) and *adi* (original). Here the reference is to the *pralaya* (destruction) when the earth was submerged under water and darkness prevailed. Nishad refers to the primal being who emerged from this destruction. The popular myth of Narain sailing in a boat with *rishi* Markandey, looking for land (after the Deluge), has astonishing parallels with the myth of Noah in the Old Testament.[8]

Legends and myths explaining the origins of the Mallahs' occupational specialisation identify Bali or Baliram as the original ancestor who ferried Lord Rama across the Ganga in Benaras. The legend states that in reward for his services, Rama gave him a horse. Owing to his ignorance, Baliram placed the bridle on the horse's tail instead of on the head. From this came the custom of placing the rudder of a boat at the stern instead of at the bow (Singh 1998: 2164).

Among the most popular and oft-cited Puranic myths is one that maintains that Nishads originated from the right thigh of King Venu. Upon churning his right thigh, a short, dark, flat-nosed, short-limbed, large-jawed, copper-haired man with blood-shot eyes, appeared. He innocently asked the *rishis* what he should do, to which they responded, *Nishid*, i.e., 'sit beside us'. He came to be known as Nishad and was made master of the forests and mountains. On churning the left thigh, a

[8] Interview with Shri Kailash Nath, village Sarai Mohana, Varanasi, January 1998.

fair-skinned man appeared, who was named 'Puru'. Puru was made master of the city, and it is from him that caste Hindus trace their origin (Nath n.d.). The significance of this myth is the claim that dark-skinned people were the precursors of mankind.

Kailash Nath, a retired Nishad school teacher, cites the reference to Nishads in Vedic literature as the Panchjan (the fifth), undefeated original inhabitants of the land. He underlines the fact that, in the story, the Aryans, who were divided into four varnas, accepted Nishads at par with themselves in terms of cultural attainments.[9] This myth is symptomatic of another set of beliefs that sought to establish parity with the Aryans, who were clearly warriors superior to the original inhabitants of the land. Here the etymological similarity of Nishad with '*ni*', the highest note on the musical scale, is also cited as establishing the Nishads' superiority in the caste hierarchy.

Clearly, the varied thrusts and claims of these origin tales fulfilled different needs of the caste. Remembering and retelling the myth in the colonial context sought to underline the gradual deterioration of the community as the Aryan/Brahmin culture came to be associated with every source of power. By claiming parity, the community sought to gain two things. First, it questioned the prevailing superiority of the Brahmanical structure. Second, it demanded that the hierarchy be obliterated and parity restored.

IV

Low caste status, 'backwardness' and criminality

The history of terms such as 'Backward' and 'Depressed' encapsulates the evolving colonial perceptions of these categories and the state's

[9] Here Ghurye's account is pertinent:

> The Nishadas, on the other hand, seem to have been a section liked by the Aryans, probably because they were amenable to their civilized notions. The Vedic expression '*panchyanah*', is explained by tradition, belonging to the latter part of this period, to mean the four varnas and the Nishadas, a fact which shows that the people had by this time become quite acceptable to the Aryans. This conclusion is also borne out by a text of the Kaushitaki Brahmana, requiring the sacrifice in a particular rite to reside temporarily with the Nishadas. It seems that the Vedic Dasa, by constant association and slow assimilation, had been partially differentiated into the Sudra and partially into the Nishada, while the refractory and incorrigible elements were specially despised and styled Paulkasa and Chandala (Ghurye 1961: 52).

Similarly, Jha cites N.K Dutt (*Culture and society in India*) as maintaining that the Nishads were slowly assimilated into the brahmanical society as a fifth caste (Jha 1974: 71).

on-going concerns with the control and management of the groups that were so designated. From the late 19th-century to the 1930s, a cluster of terms developed within the bureaucratic context, particularly the census, which described various aspects of backwardness, low caste status and the phenomenon of depressed status. The terms included 'Outcastes', 'Depressed Castes' and 'Exterior Castes' (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 2000: 4). There was also an evolution of the notion of 'Scheduled Castes', that is, a list of castes entitled to parliamentary seats, public employment and special educational benefits (ibid.). The emphases and concerns reflected in the terms varied considerably by region, at least until the 1930s. For instance, in 1921 in princely Mysore, 'Backward' communities were defined as all communities other than Brahmans who were not adequately represented in public service, with a view to encouraging them in that direction (Galanter 1984: 156). However, in 1930, the State Committee in Bombay recommended that the term 'Depressed Classes' be used for 'Untouchables', according to the usage of the times. In the United Provinces from 1930 onwards, many suggestions were made to the Indian Franchise committee, one being that 'Depressed Classes' should include 'Untouchable' as well as 'Backward Classes'. It was also pointed out that the term 'Depressed', while carrying connotations of Backwardness, includes communities belonging to non twice-born castes, the degenerate or shudra classes of Hindus. These were described as 'low' (socially, educationally and economically), constituting 60 per cent of the population. Finally 'Backward Classes' emerged as the more inclusive classification for all those needing special treatment: a stratum higher than the Untouchables, but depressed nevertheless (ibid.: 157).

To understand the role played by the census in constituting notions of backwardness, this section begins with a focus on the broad caste breakup in Bihar in 1931. This is followed by a discussion of the chief Census Commissioner of UP, A.C. Turner's understanding of the nature of caste backwardness. As will be seen, the latter introduced the notion of 'criminality' as a defining criterion of backwardness, a move which was to have significant implications for Mallah identity formation.

Table 1 outlines the major caste groups of Bihar, and the percentage of the population comprised by them.

To supplement this picture, one might add that data from the 1961 census shows that Muslims constituted 12.5 per cent, scheduled castes 14.1 and scheduled tribes 9.1 per cent. Thus, according to the table, the lower shudras were the most populous group, together comprising the largest chunk of the population, some 32 per cent.

Table 1
Major Caste Groups of Bihar

Category	*Caste Group*		*Percent of total pop.*
Twice born castes	Brahman		4.7
	Bhumihar		2.9
	Rajput		4.2
	Kayastha		1.2
	Bania		0.6
		Total	13.6 per cent
Upper shudras	Yadav		11.0
	Kurmi		3.6
	Kouri		4.1
		Total	18.7 per cent
Lower shudras	Teli		2.8
	Nine caste groups between 1 and 2 per cent		13.2
	Other less than 1 per cent		16.0
		Total	32 per cent

Source: Blair: 1981: 161.

Against the background outlined above, tracing the fortunes of the Mallahs through the decennial census reports reflects on the evolution and crystallisation of the colonial view on 'backwardness'. While in 1911 there was an effort to identify castes and tribes which did not conform to certain religious standards or were subject to certain religious disabilities, by 1931 a more focused list was prepared of the depressed classes. In 1911 the enquiry was directed at identifying castes which: (a) denied the supremacy of brahmans; (b) did not receive a *mantra* from a brahman or recognised Hindu guru; (c) denied the authority of the Vedas; (d) did not worship the great Hindu gods; (e) were not served by good Brahmans as family priests; (f) had no brahmans as priests at all; (g) were denied access to the interior of ordinary Hindu temples; (h) caused pollution by touch or within a certain distance; (i) buried their dead; or (j) ate beef and did not revere the cow (Lacey 1933).

While no caste or tribe in Bihar fell within categories (c) and (d), 14 castes were found to be common to both the 1911 and 1931 lists. These were then classed as 'Untouchable' castes, comprising the following: Bauri, Bhuiya, Bhumij, Chamar, Dhobi, Dom, Dosadh, Hari, Kandra, Mochi, Musahar, Pan, Pasi and Rajwar. These castes were distinct from the list of aboriginal tribes, which were regarded as being

on a different footing from the depressed Hindu castes. Notably, none of the fishing or boating castes was named in either of these categories, though in 1911 they were classed as 'causing pollution by touch or within a certain distance'. Tiyar, the fishing caste, found mention in a group of four castes, Ganda, Kalwar, Sunri and Tiyar. However, in 1931 it was decided that these castes were on the borderline of the depressed criteria:

> Reports received from the districts where they are chiefly found indicated that, although they are very backward and poor and are held in low estimation, the same stigma did not attach to them as other castes which have been included in the present list (Lacey 1933: Appendix III, 286).

Eleven other castes figured in the 1911 list, but not in the 1931 list. These were: Baishnab, Beldar, Bind, Gareri, Kewat, Kharwar, Kumhar, Mallah, Nuniya, Tanti and Teli (Lacey 1933). This list included three of our significant Mallah castes (Bind, Mallah and Kewat), but their names were dropped in 1931 as:

> In most cases the only disability alleged on behalf of these communities was that they were not served by good Brahmans as family priests, though a few (Mallah, Tanti and Teli) were also said to be denied access to the interior of Hindu temples.... For present purposes, it is doubtful whether any of these eleven castes should be treated as depressed classes (Lacey 1933: 286).

In other words, there seemed to be insufficient justification for classifying any of the Mallah jatis as 'Depressed' in Bihar. Clearly the 'depressed' category in this case covered castes which faced the stigma of untouchability, whereas in every census the Mallah cluster of castes was recognised as occupying a position higher in the social scale than the untouchable or polluting castes.

A.C. Turner, the Census Commissioner for the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, in his Report on the 1931 Census offered a more detailed, comprehensive and historical coverage of the origin of untouchables and depressed classes, arguing that the disabilities which follow from untouchability are: (a) exclusion from temples; (b) refusal by Brahmans to perform religious ceremonies; and (c) exclusion from village wells. Such castes and tribes were listed under the two heads of 'Untouchable and Depressed' (List A), and 'Touchable but Depressed' (List B). As Turner explained:

> the untouchable and depressed classes are of course backward as well, but in addition to these there are other tribes and castes both Hindus and Muslims who, whilst not being depressed, are more conspicuously backward than the average tribe and caste. These can be divided into: (1) Criminal tribes and (2) Other tribes and castes, both Hindus and Muslims (Turner 1933: 630).

While the Mallah and Kewat were gazetted as criminal in the whole or a part of the province, these two were not included among the 'Untouchable and Depressed' classes as were many others in the gazetted list (Turner 1933: 631). Turner also prepared another list of tribes and castes that were 'undoubtedly backward'. This list included the Mallah castes of Bind, Chai (Chain or Chaini), Kadhera, Surahiya and Tiyar (See Table 2).

Table 2
Undoubtedly Backward Castes Allied to Mallah in the United Provinces (1931)

Serial Numbers of Caste/Tribe	*Occupation*	*Where Chiefly Found*
12) Bind	Ploughing, fishing, earthwork	East of province
16) Chai	Cultivation, fishing, thieving	Oudh and east of province
31) Kadhera	Cultivation	Riverside
59) Surahiya	Boating, fishing, cultivation	Eastern districts
63) Tiyar	Boating, fishing	Eastern districts

Source: Abstracted from larger table in Turner (1933: 631–33).

As the census became more closely intertwined with new political issues and as new constitutional reforms brought greater democracy to the political scene, religious and interest groups developed along lines laid out in the census (Jones 1981: 95). With the Government of India Act of 1935, a new social category evolved, with separate electorates and seats being reserved for scheduled and depressed castes. These were members of groups labelled in the census reports as 'Untouchables', and individuals who were classed as backward tribes (ibid.: 96). As Jones remarks in this regard:

> What had begun as concepts in the minds of British officials became categories in the census reports. These categories, in turn, were defined, elaborated, and given statistical substance over the decades, finally to emerge as social and cultural divisions fixed permanently in the constitution of British India (Jones 1981: 97).

In short, the census operations set in motion certain instruments of upward mobility, which were seized by most caste groups hoping to raise themselves in the hierarchy of castes. However, a reverse and contradictory process was also underway from 1871, whereby certain castes and sections of castes were singled out by the colonial state for surveillance and control. While the Mallahs of the United Provinces on the one hand were seeking to be registered under the name of Nishads in an effort to raise their status, some branches of the caste were described by the state as having 'criminal tendencies', and as being ungovernable and prone to vagrancy, requiring strict policing and vigilance. In Bihar, the Binds, a caste occupationally similar to the Mallahs and considered a subcaste of the Mallahs, were recognised as committing organised dacoities (Yang 1985b: 113). How the Mallahs entered the official discourse as criminal tribes and the long-term implications of this negative state recognition for the collective identity of the caste is explored in the next section.

Mallahs as 'Criminal Tribes'

This section traces the colonial state's logic in identifying some sections and subcastes of the Mallahs as 'criminal'. Such labelling had long-term implications for Mallah self-perception and identity. In fact, even after Independence, these categories remained influential.

In 1871, the Criminal Tribes Act (Act XXVII of 1871) was passed to provide for the registration, surveillance and control of certain tribes. The category of 'Criminal Tribe' in the Act was so worded that it covered any gang or group of persons addicted to the commission of non-bailable offences. Registration under the Act was seen as a 'very efficient weapon in the hands of the police for dealing with organised crime, but it also very materially reduces the work in the surveillance on the more dangerous criminals in each district' (Home Police Dept., May 1914). Gang registers maintained by the police contained names of persons known to commit offences in combination with each other (ibid.). In the United Provinces alone, 2.8 million people were identified as members of criminal tribes. By this Act, local governments could designate as criminals any tribes, gangs or class of persons addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences. The Act's provisions also empowered officials to resettle criminal tribes or to remove them to reformatory settlements (Nigam 1987: 274).

Inherent in the law were assumptions about readily identifiable 'dangerous castes with criminal tendencies'. Persons of such castes were destined to commit crimes, owing to the usages of their caste, which not

only condoned such activity but also provided the network of support which sustained it over a period of time. Notions of 'habitual, hereditary offenders' borrowed from 19th century western writings found an echo in the caste system, which supposedly determined a caste's traits and behavioural characteristics.

One of the consequences of declaring a caste as criminal, highlighted by historians (e.g., Freitag 1985; Nigam 1990; Radhakrishna 1992), is the blocking of recruitment in the police and army for members of these castes. When the Kurmis, for instance, were declared 'criminal' in Bihar, this spurred intense activity among Kurmi caste associations and generated heated discussions on the closure of recruitment in the forces (Frankel 1989: 90). As members of the Mallah caste were noted to have taken to settled agriculture, it seemed logical to suggest that reform for these groups should be directed at somehow settling them on land, given the overall governmental unease with non-settled occupations.

This single Act served several purposes of the colonial state, including the suppression of innumerable tribal revolts and rebellions. In the case of the Mallahs, by enforcing curbs on their mobility and ensuring greater vigilance on waterways and rivers, the Act appears to have succeeded in facilitating secure transportation of revenue producing raw materials and goods. It thereby provided a fillip to the growth of industries along the Ganges, ranging from Moradabad brassware, silk and zari manufacture, furniture, etc. Bands of arrested anti-social elements could be enlisted for localised labour-intensive state projects such as laying roads and railway lines. The Act, therefore, had its own set of unintended consequences.

William Crooke's *The tribes and castes of north-western India* (1896: 460) gives a good indication of the emerging perceptions of the colonial state regarding the Mallahs in this period. Crooke asserts that 'there is good evidence that many river dakaities committed in Bengal are the work of Mallahs of these provinces.' He goes on to quote Buchannan, a Bengal administrator.

> Dr. Buchannan writes, 'of late years the merchants, not only in Gorakhpur, but everywhere I have observed on the Ganges and its branches, have suffered from heavy losses from the carelessness and dissipation of the boatmen, who have become totally unmanageable. They have discovered the very great difficulty, if not impossibility, of obtaining legal redress against people who have nothing, who are paid in advance and who can in general escape from justice by moving from place to place with the first boat that sails. There is great reason to suspect that the owners of the boat, or at least the Majhi who works for

them, connive at the tricks of the men, and taking full hire allow part of the crew to desert, giving them a trifle, and keeping the remainder to themselves. The owners of the boats are totally careless about keeping the goods, and the composure with which I have seen the boatmen sitting, while the merchant was tearing his hair and his property going to ruin, was totally astonishing. Much of this has of course ceased since the introduction of the railway system has considerably reduced river traffic. But even now Mallahs bear an indifferent reputation as regards their dealings with their employers' (Crooke 1896: 460).

Table 3 lists the numbers of individuals of Class B, i.e., 'the well-known criminal tribes...who had recently settled down to agriculture', registered under Section 10 of the Criminal Tribes Act.

Table 3
Registration Under Section 10 of Act XXVII, 1872 for Well-Known Criminals Recently Settled in Agriculture

Sl.No.	*'Tribe/Caste'*	*Total to be Registered*
1	Badaks	1031
2	Barwars	5130
3	Bauriahs	1946
4	Daleras	1786
5	Doms	1581
6	Kanjars	121
7	Jogi Pathan	131
8	Ghosis	456
9	Rinds	98
10	Chain Mallahs	1203
11	Chain Chamars	554
12	Taga Bhat	320
13	Qudhyas	237

Source: Nigam 1987: 274.

It will be seen from this table that 1,203 Chain Mallahs belonging to Class B (i.e., those who had recently taken to settled agriculture) were registered under Section 10 of the Act. Further, in 1911, under Section A of the same Act, substantial numbers of seven prominent castes and tribes of the United Provinces (i.e., Aherias, Bhars, Pasis, Gujars, Mewatis, Dusadhs and Chamars) were registered. Class A consisted of those who were supposed to belong to large gangs of criminals but who held land and were therefore regarded as 'quasi agricultural tribes'. Another section, Class C, comprising the 'dangerous gangs of

criminals', for whom resettlement and transportation were prescribed, included tribes such as the Sansis (Nigam 1987: 275). The total numbers of Class A, B and C were 22,293 in 1911 (ibid.). Until 1936, as the Act extended to cover many more groups, the figures kept increasing. It is interesting to note that during these years, the proclamations were not restricted to caste groups but covered smaller groups of approximately 20 criminal gangs, such as the 36 Mewatis or the 265 Kewats of Basti. The latter, related to the Mallahs, were brought under surveillance in 1914 on the basis of a single police report, which cast suspicion on the Kewats' involvement in 397 undetected cases since 1908 (ibid.). Clearly, once it was established that surveillance was sufficient to control the activities of those considered criminal tribes, the Act was used to control large sections of the population. By 1938, approximately 41,000 people were registered under the Act in the United Provinces. Thus, in addition to the Mallah subcaste of Binds, castes such as Nutts, Bowreahs, Sonareahs, Budduks, Bedyas and Shikarees, Maghiya Doms, Dosadhs, Musahars, Koneriahs, Rajwars, Banjars, and Dharees were among those identified as criminal tribes by Bengal officials (Yang 1985: 114).

Table 4 lists the sequence of Mallah registrations under Section 10 of the Criminal Tribes Act between February 1914 and November 1927 in different cities of the United Provinces.

Table 4
Dated Sequence of Mallah Registrations as Criminals under Section 10 of the Criminal Tribes Act XXVIII

February 1914		
Mallah	Agra	126
Chain Mallah	Mirzapur	32
Mallah	Bulandshahr	53
Chain Mallah	Gorakhpur	159
Chain Mallah	Ballia	226
Chain Mallah	Aligarh	22
November 1917		
Chain Mallah	Agra	765
Chain Mallah	Etawah	497
September 1925		
Chain Mallah	Aligarh	45
November 1927		
Mallah	Agra	Number unknown

Source: Nigam 1987: 275

In thus defining and identifying groups of offenders by caste, the Criminal Tribes Act extended the stigma of criminality to the entire jati and its various subcastes. The broader implications of such labelling for Mallah communities, particularly the impact on relationships with members of other caste groups in specific locations, needs further examination. In the next section we explore contemporary responses to such labelling and seek to establish, through fieldwork, some of the ways in which the 'criminal' past is remembered by members of the caste.

V

Nishad identity: Contemporary responses

In this concluding section, we bring together the various strands relating to Mallah identity formation which had roots in the concerns of the colonial state and processes that were set in motion in the early years of the 20th century. We have isolated the decisive components in the construction of Mallah identity as the following three: (i) the attribution of 'criminal' status, assigned by the colonial state for the regulation, administrative control and surveillance of 'Mallah' and related 'unsettled' caste groups within the context of traditional agrarian economies; (ii) claims to the overarching title 'Nishad' by a large and diverse number of fishing and riverfaring castes, both for purposes of standardisation in the census record as well as for the forging of a common and distinct identity; and (iii) the attribution of a socio-economic and politically 'backward' status to a large number of castes deriving their livelihoods from water-based activities and occupations. The relevance of exploring the colonial logic assumes greater significance in the light of the post-colonial state's policy of extending compensatory discrimination towards precisely those groups which had earlier been notified as criminal. Ironically, in thus singling out for 'denotification' those tribes and castes which had been identified by the colonial state as vagrant, the post-colonial state in fact applied the same criteria, thereby reinforcing the biases and assumptions inherent in the colonial discourse.

Mallah criminality

That the above views also find an echo in the *Report* on Criminal Tribes as late as 1948, i.e., after Independence, points to the enormous administrative and ideological baggage inherited from the colonial state, some of which took decades to shed. This serves to underline the importance of examining colonial discourses for deeper sociological insights into

issues of contemporary concern. The effects of these discourses on identity-formation in the post-colonial era can then be assessed. Take, for example, the following entry in the *Report of the Criminal Tribes Enquiry Committee* (1949–50: 28):[10]

> *Mallahs*—Mallahs are notified as Criminal Tribes in Uttar Pradesh. The term Mallah is purely occupational and seems to have been taken from the arabic term 'mallah' meaning 'to move its wings as bird'.... Their origin is not definite but according to one story they are descendants of Nishada, a mountain tribe of the Vindhya-range. They are also known as Chain in Mathura district. Their social status is low. They eat all kinds of fish and tortoise. In the past they were reported to be committing river dacoities. But they are now reported to be operating in railway trains and other crowded places. They are also good at picking pockets, and also commit thefts and other minor offences. All of them are however not criminal and most of them have settled down in agriculture.

The statement reflects the concerns of the colonial state regarding the governance of marginalised and non-mainstream social groups and reinforces the stereotypes and biases inherent in colonial policy. Besides implicitly setting up an equation between low status and the consumption of certain types of food, the Enquiry Committee statement makes a significant leap: from identifying certain members of a caste as indulging in dacoity, theft and minor offences, it suggests that the caste itself has certain inherent tendencies which predispose it to crime, such that river dacoities would perforce give way to railway crime—all this without the slightest concern for the long-term implications of such public condemnation for the caste in question.

Based on on-going fieldwork since 1999 in villages of Jaunpur, Varanasi, Ara and Chapra, it is possible to demonstrate a varied remembrance and response to the colonial state's discourse on Mallah criminality. In pockets with no collective memory of criminality, the notion of backwardness and the logic of submerging differences in favour of an overarching Nishad identity are key elements of that identity. However, in popular consciousness and in Bhojpuri folklore, the Chain Mallahs do have a reputation for petty thievery as reflected in the sayings '*Ka Chain lekha kaile bara*' ('why do you behave like a Chain') and '*Chor Chain ka kay bharosa* ('how can one trust a thief or Chain?'). This itself makes the case for the respectability, which the term 'Nishad' provided.

[10] This passage appears to have drawn its arguments from Crooke's discussion of the Mallah, referred to earlier.

The history of Mallah criminality is remembered differently from the state discourse by its political leadership and by 'organic intellectuals' within the community. For instance, according to Tilakdhari Nishad, a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader and office bearer of the Jaunpur district Naukaghat Association,

> In 1857 during the first war of Independence, Nishads made a tremendous contribution which is today forgotten. Revolutionaries such as Nanaji and Topeji requested our community for cooperation. They used to sink the boats of the British and bring their weapons to the revolutionaries. Since that time, the British declared our *samaj* as '*jarayampesha*' (professional criminals). Despite Independence, our name has not been struck off that list. Our people died for this country's freedom, yet there is no recognition of this fact. Our community's role is forgotten. We are looked at with hatred. I wish that since our community has made such a contribution, it should flourish and our name be struck off the Criminal Tribe list.

A parallel anecdote of Mallah valour recounted by Shivprasad Chaudhary of Ara underlines the role of Mallahs in ferrying the mutineers in 1857, particularly the folk hero Kunwar Singh, who was shot as he tried to cross the river. According to him, while Kunwar Singh is eulogised in the region, the heroic role of the Mallah boatman, Bhola Manjhi, who also lost his life in the process, remains unacknowledged. Such anecdotes reassert Mallah pride and serve as the community's denial of a troubling criminal past. Alternative histories commend the economic contribution of Mallahs in the transportation of goods when roadways and railways were non-existent. They invariably suggest an erosion and marginalisation on account of the infrastructural changes introduced during colonial rule. Tilakdahri Nishad, for example, cites the transportation by Mallah barges of the stone used in the construction of monuments such as the Red Fort in Delhi. Pride in Mallah professional specialisations, especially the ability to save the drowning, and in ancient knowledge systems relating to navigation, are other elements of Mallah identity expressed in a rich repertoire of tales and anecdotes.

Caste identity

Fieldwork established the continued appeal of the idea of a Nishad identity. As sociologists have cautioned, caste names are not as transparent as they appear, being not only a mark of identification of the caste

group, but also a symbol of its status (Shah 1996: 179). As Quigley remarks (1999: 5), 'One cannot choose one's jati; it is defined by birth. But one can choose whether one's jati refers to a more or less inclusive group: this is going to depend on context'. Hence caste names have always been used contextually, one name being used in the context of marriage, another in the context of religious rituals and a third in the context of demanding privileges from the state. As a result, there is rarely a straight answer to the question of caste identity. Further, the geographical spread of caste members over more than one state means that members of a single endogamous unit use different names in different places. A.M. Shah has pointed out that the term 'subcaste' itself may be inadequate to describe the internal divisions of the caste, given that in some cases there are first, second and third order subdivisions. What complicates the issue is that people themselves use the word 'jati' for caste divisions of *all* orders, and only detailed enquiries can reveal the precise unit which is being referred to, as well as the number of subdivisions which exist in the various divisions of the various orders (Shah 1996: 181).

In Jaunpur, Kewats are well-integrated into the agrarian economy. They perceive themselves as quite distinct from the Mallahs who are associated with traditional river-based occupations. However, these distinct and separate caste identities are now being blurred through the efforts of the political leadership. For instance, the Nishad leadership encourages inter-marriage between, say, Kewats and Binds in the interest of forging a Nishad unity, though for the present the endogamous nature of the eight kuris or subcastes remains intact. The traditional occupational specialisations continue to present a strong barrier to the intermarriage of a fishing jati with a riverfaring one, the fishing jatis being deemed as '*pratiloma* (against the grain) Nishads'.[11] The relative economic prosperity of Mallahs who had engaged in water transportation reinforces the status distinctions between the two. A 1986 issue of the journal *Nishad jagran*, published from Bihar, reported that while the various subcastes had previously been separate and distinct from each other, relations of '*roti aur beti*' (commensal and connubial relationships) among them are now being forged, and blood ties being established among castes such as Kewat, Surahiya, Khulwat, Banpar, etc. (*Nishad jagran*, November 1986: 7).

[11] *Pratiloma* refers to socially unacceptable unions, which are usually hypogamous.

The important economic and political ends served by the assertion of a common Nishad identity provides the logic for the unification of various subcastes under a common title. In today's context these demands include: (1) tenders for plying boats and fishing on the ghats be given to Mallahs and auction of ghats be prohibited; (2) Mallah associations alone be granted permission to extract sand from riverbeds; (3) *pattas* on *kachar* lands (i.e., the lands adjacent to the river, which become cultivable after the waters recede) be granted to Mallahs for cultivation of seasonal vegetables and crops such as cucumbers, pumpkins, *parwal*, etc.; (4) fishing rights in village ponds be granted to Mallah cooperatives.

Such demands, relating to Mallah occupational specialisations, continue to be voiced by the Nishad leadership, and several instances of success on these and related issues were cited by informants. However, it needs to be pointed out that the concerns of Nishad identity politics tend to remain confined to specific areas such as those listed above.

Mallah 'backwardness'

It is the element of 'backwardness' which is of overriding concern for the Nishad political leadership today, mostly on account of the compensatory discrimination from the state that this identity ensures. As we have seen, the caste entered the colonial discourse on backwardness as early as the 1930s. While the colonial discourse limited itself to addressing some of the most glaring of caste inequalities (untouchability or prohibition on temple entry), the post-colonial state was constitutionally committed to redressing inequalities and building a casteless and egalitarian nation-state. Drawing upon the spadework done in this direction by the colonial state, the post-colonial state extended its concerns to cover an increasingly vast canvas, putting in place a series of measures for the redressal of inequalities. The category of 'Other Backward Classes' came to occupy a significant place in the state's efforts. In fact, so powerful has been the appeal of the advantages that the OBC categorisation provides in terms of compensatory discrimination that castes now vie to be listed as OBC, as they earlier did to be recognised as Kshatriya.

A popular perception about the Mallahs, voiced in Jaunpur, sums up contemporary understandings of the reasons for Mallah backwardness:

> In contrast to the gains of some like the Yadavas or even the Chamars, Mallahs suffer from a 'displaced' mentality. Owing to repeated floods along river banks where they reside, they are constantly forced to

> relocate. How will they cultivate, since close to the river the soil is sandy—which major crop can possibly grow there?[12]

In the post-Independence era, a wide range of factors such as poverty, occupation, place of habitation, and education, etc., in addition to caste criteria, has become relevant in determining the degree and extent of backwardness. By these criteria, the Backward Classes Commission identified the Mallahs, among others, as 'Most Backward'. Today this caste is in competition with other MBC groups, comprising the ex-artisan and service workers such as Kahars, Kumhar, Lohar, Tatwa, Teli and Dhanuks, who are usually poor peasants and agricultural labourers, as well as a range of scheduled castes, for the same scarce resources. Ironically, this recognition of the Mallahs' economic proximity to the scheduled castes of the region has resulted in a strong demand by its leadership to be included within the SC category. In support of this demand, informants repeatedly compared their own economic insecurity and marginalisation with the seeming prosperity of SC groups like the Chamars, who have been the beneficiaries of numerous government schemes, including low-cost housing, reservations in government service and educational institutions, and representation in parliament and local level political structures.

Introspection within the Mallah political leadership, induced by comparing Mallah marginalisation with the relative prosperity of sections of state-favoured scheduled caste groups, has also prompted the emergence of varying strategies calculated to obtain similar concessions from the state. One strategy, observed during my fieldwork, relates to attempts by the leadership to forge a political alliance with scheduled caste groups by emphasising a shared history of deprivation; another stressed commonality between, and alliances with, members of the other MBC groups of the region. The caste journals *Nishad jyoti* and *Nishad jagran* and various political statements seek to make a case for such alliances and to mount sufficiently convincing arguments in their support. Brahmanical myths are retold with alterations in order to subvert the established social order. An example is a contemporary retelling of a popular Puranic myth about the churning of the ocean. The myth of the highly malevolent power, Rahu, wherein the phenomenon of the eclipse is explained, is advanced to underline the proximity of Mallahs to other downtrodden

[12] Dr. Bharat, representative of Bhoomi Sangharsh Samiti, Jaunpur, during discussion with members of NGOs working on land issues in Jaunpur (6th November 2000, Badlapur, Jaunpur).

groups.[13] In this retelling by Tilakdhari Nishad, the BSP leader from Jaunpur, several elements of the Brahmanical order are questioned, and attention focused on its injustice, inequality and deception. Common cause is made with demons rather than the gods to highlight the manner in which Brahmanism has kept the lowly perpetually disadvantaged:

> When the ocean was being churned, both *devatas* and demons participated and 14 *ratnas* appeared, including the cow, poison, *amrit* (ambrosia), etc. At the time of dividing up the ambrosia and poison among the demons and gods, Lord Vishnu played a dirty trick! Taking the form of a beautiful woman, he persuaded the demons to consume the poison. Perceiving this deception, one of the demons sat among the gods and consumed the ambrosia. This so infuriated Vishnu that he beheaded the demon with his *sudarshan chakra*. Today this demon is alive and known as the planet Rahu.[14]

In the following statements by Tilakdhari Nishad, the specific political purpose that the retelling of the myth seeks to serve becomes clearer:

> Thus whenever our strength increases, Vishnu makes sure that he destroys us. This occurs because 'they' are learned and we are illiterate. We rely on our bodily strength and continue to fight, choosing to become martyrs rather than recognise their superiority. We have always been tricked but accept it as our fate.
>
> Now, however, we refuse to accept this. We do not revere god Vishnu. You may have seen that in our homes there are no pictures of Vishnu but of Dr. Ambedkar, who was the leader of our people. He guided us towards education, to form *sangathans* and fight for our rights. For

[13] This myth has been discussed at length by Ranajit Guha in his essay, 'The career of an anti-god in heaven and on earth' (1985). He points out that myths are about ancient and unresolved antagonisms. In this case, anxieties about lapses in social order were associated, in popular imagination, with what appeared to be a particularly sinister lapse in the functioning of nature at an eclipse (ibid.: 3).

[14] In the Hindu syncretic tradition, Rahu is seen as a disruptive force at the cosmological as well as sociological level, his appearance in the sky triggering Brahmanical fears about the imminent end of the world. Guha cites Rahu worship among Dosadhs as defiance against the Brahmans. The claiming of descent from Rahu among Mirzapur Dosadhs and Rahu's 'cultic standing among members of the Dom group [is] yet another instance of lower-caste resistance to the hegemony of varna-Hindu culture.' Finally, the caste of Mangs is described as demons who swallow the moon at the time of the eclipse (Guha 1985: 6, 13, 15). These outcaste groups, Guha suggests, actually play the role of mediators between an eclipse and all it threatens by its malevolence and impurity (ibid.).

thousands of years we were enslaved. We are struggling to break the chains of this *ghulami* [enslavement] and stand on our feet. As Swami Vivekananda said in his 1937 speech, Bharat will become independent in 1957. Similarly one day Nishad-raj will surely come.

In contrast with the folkloric dimensions of the *Kewat prasang* from Tulsidas' Ramayana, which permeates subaltern consciousness in the region, such sentiments indicate the existence of multiple understandings of myths and their continued judicious and complex adaptations for political ends. In a popular Bhojpuri folksong version of the *prasang*, the Mallah who refused payment for ferrying Rama across the river cites jati injunctions against charging same-caste jajmans for services rendered:

Jati se jati khewai na le la
Dhobi se dhobi dhoaee na le la
(For members of the same caste, the ferrying fee cannot be charged
Just as the washerman will not accept laundering fees from his own caste *dhobi*).

In the folksong, Rama, the *avatar* of Vishnu, is perceived by the boatman as a member of his own Mallah caste: no ordinary one, but of the Bhavsagar (creation), who ferries people across from 'this' to the 'other' world. The Mallah establishes kinship with Rama thus:

Uhe din paar ham ka jaaye deye ke
Uhe din paar karihe, kare jor taani
(When the day of reckoning comes, what could possibly count as adequate compensation for transportation to the next world?
Today I ferry you across the river; When my time comes, pray deliver me safely to the next).

These sentiments from Tulsidas' Ramcharitmanas, the most revered and accessible religious text of the region, permeate popular consciousness. Arguments establishing the proximity of the Kewat to Rama are accepted, strongly endorsed and continually cited, to establish the unique and privileged position of the riverfaring castes in the Brahmanical order. Constructing an alternative, non-Brahmanical view, which would serve to dislodge these views and in the process forge an alliance with the oppressed forces rather than the Brahmanical oppressors, continues to pose a significant challenge to the contemporary political leadership of the Mallahs.

VI
Conclusion

This article has attempted to trace the construction and emergence of Mallah identity in the Bhojpuri-speaking region as a consequence of state intervention. By the middle of the 20th century, the Mallahs or Nishads were acquiring an identity which was to a large extent shaped by the perceptions and requirements of the colonial state. The occupational diversity of the caste reflected in the various subcastes, a function of its historical evolution and shrinking resource base, was glossed over in the state's attempts at achieving uniformity and standardisation for its census operations. The diversity of these castes and the difficult transitions that they are likely to have made from river to agrarian economies was erased from colonial understanding. Instead, the various segments of the caste were marginalised. The state's preoccupation with linear hierarchies further disguised differentiation within the caste. As a result Mallahs and several related castes and subcastes were defined in the colonial discourse as 'backward' and positioned just above the untouchable castes. The colonial discourse left little space for Mallah self-perception and understanding of relative status where water-related services, ritually 'clean' status, and an ancient tradition were paramount. The census operations, designed for administrative control, also in effect served to wipe out data on these castes; as we have seen, by 1931, many of these subcastes were no longer listed.

With the declaration of segments of the Mallahs in various regions as criminal tribes, the stigma of backwardness was further compounded, closing opportunities and spaces for social mobility, which may have been available for other 'lower' castes. As colonial control was predicated upon a settled, geographically located, easily identifiable and thus controllable population, the 'wandering' nature and unsettled conditions of Mallah livelihood patterns on a shifting river terrain made for difficult surveillance and control. Thus, in classifying lower caste populations by single occupations, their differentiation was lost, and a whole range of peoples were clubbed as 'Criminal' simply because the nature of their work entailed movement.

Tracing the history of Mallah identity formation over almost a century has thrown up significant issues of relevance for the debate on inclusion of caste in the census today. The Mallah case highlights the manner in which the standardisation procedures of the colonial census had led to the ignoring of the customs, cultures and occupational diversity

represented by a range of castes. While the Other Backward Classes, of which the Mallahs form a significant component, constitute approximately 51 per cent of the population of the region, there is little information on the entire range of castes represented by this category. Understanding the diversity of the middle level castes presents a challenge for sociologists and researchers, which should pave the way for more thorough and meaningful enquiries on caste.

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Public genealogies: Documents, bodies and nations in Anglo-Indian railway family histories

Laura Bear

This article argues for an approach to archives and documents that focusses on their material effects. It traces the impact of the East Indian Railway Nationality Files on the intimate stories of family genealogies among Anglo-Indian railway workers. The procedures of proof and record-keeping associated with these files (kept from 1927–50) displaced Anglo-Indian family histories into a public realm of state documents and archives, making these the final arbiters and guardians of their origins. Anglo-Indian workers often protested their assigned status by writing to the bureaucracy, especially as family members were regularly classed differently by distinct institutions. They sought a continuous public genealogy for themselves. Their interest in doing this and the practices of the nationality archive reveal the new conjunctions between political rights and family origins in Indian civil society. Increasingly, both the jati of nationalists and the enumerable community of colonial bureaucrats rested on a genealogical imperative, which excluded Anglo-Indians because of their 'mixed' origins from belonging to either India or Britain. The material effects of this historical moment and the archive are visible in contemporary conversations with Anglo-Indian railway families. They tell stories of disappearing documents, of ghosts disturbed by lack of an archive, of their bodies as treacherous records of identity and of the impossibilities of being an Indian community.

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At least since the 1980s, historians and anthropologists have analysed archives as institutions full of silences, fictions and struggles. Many studies of the archive have addressed absences, the difficulties of recapturing subaltern voices and the negotiations of power that are readable in files. In this paper I draw on all of these insights, but I want to focus on documents as material artefacts, and archives, as active institutions that interact with the telling of private family histories. Rather than just reading between the lines or against the grain of archives, I want to suggest that we should ask historical questions about when and why people, communities and voices become entangled in their practices. We need to see archives as active institutions that bring certain people and communities into specific relationships with the documentary past in ways that help to shape experiences of belonging and citizenship. Archives, I want to argue also, are not just institutions that exclude and silence, but they also are sometimes places which provoke irresolvable longings and anxieties about a lost documentary past, not only among historians.

I have been drawn to thinking through these issues from the experience of carrying out ethnographic and archival research on the emergence of an Anglo-Indian railway caste under British rule in India. The employment hierarchy of the colonial railways was founded in the late 1850s on the idea of the judicious arrangement of races and castes. Officers sent from Britain filled all the high administrative posts. Domiciled Europeans and Eurasians were placed in upper subordinate positions as drivers, guards and workshop supervisors.[1] Different categories of Indians were assigned jobs as labourers in the workshops and on the railway lines according to their caste and regional origins. Domiciled Europeans and Eurasians were seen as particularly suitable for upper subordinate positions as they had an innate 'British' capacity for technical skill and responsibility.[2] From the 1850s they were preferentially recruited to these posts forming a labour aristocracy. Despite periodic efforts to reduce the expenditure

[1] In this article I use the chronologically appropriate terms for Anglo-Indians. Until 1919, the Montagu Chelmsford electoral reforms used the term Eurasian for people of mixed parentage in India. After this date Anglo-Indian was more widely used and was legally defined as people of mixed parentage who had a European ancestor in their male line of inheritance. The legal boundaries of this group, of course, shifted according to the colonial state's creation of institutions to regulate their identity, as did the names for them.

[2] For an analysis of the railway colonies and racial employment hierarchy, see my 'Miscegenations of modernity: Constructing European respectability and race in the Indian railway colony, 1857–1931 (1994).

on expensive European and Eurasian labour and an official policy of Indianisation implemented in 1870, the railways remained one of the few arenas of the colonial state that explicitly continued to give preference to Domiciled Europeans and Eurasians in recruitment to upper subordinate posts. Even as late as 1923, half of the Anglo-Indian community was employed by the railways and in 1932 almost 100 per cent of the upper subordinate positions on the state-managed railways were filled by Anglo-Indians and Domiciled Europeans.[3] These Anglo-Indian railway families were housed separately from Indian workers in railway colonies, islands of British mock Tudor architecture and faux Norman water towers and churches. From the 1870s their children were educated in railway administered English Medium schools in the plains and hills. At Independence, Anglo-Indians were guaranteed by the constitution of India reserved jobs in the public services, including the Railways. Until 1960, when these privileges expired, they were placed under the administrative authority of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The colonial railway bureaucracy transformed differences of class into differences of race, nation and community.

Before I began my ethnographic research with Anglo-Indians, I was simply interested in how they described this history and that of their families differently from the ways in which it was recorded in colonial files. But as soon as I started conversations with Anglo-Indian families in the railway colony in Kharagpur and in Calcutta, I found that history had a particular series of associations for them, none of which seemed liberating or benign. When I asked Anglo-Indians to talk about their family histories, two kinds of responses were generated. The first was an atmosphere of tension and embarrassed silence. This was so marked that I gave up asking questions like 'So tell me where your family originated', 'where your grandfather worked', etc., because these questions seemed to be a profound breach of potential friendship or even the possibility of conversation. I didn't understand this tension at first. Then one person I met, Gary Wilson, the son of a railway track inspector, who had grown up on the railways and now teaches in an English medium school, told a joke. I had just said to him that I had come to visit him to find out

[3] These figures are from, 'Petition to the Minorities Commission of the Domiciled European and Anglo-Indian Community' (*Report of the Indian Statutory Commission [Simon Commission]*, *XVI*, 1928) and K.M. Hassan (*Report on the Representation of Muslims and other Minority Communities in the Subordinate Railway Service*, 1932).

about the history of the Anglo-Indians and the railways. Gary said, 'Oh so you've come to prove that we are British and to get us all passports.' Everyone in the room laughed, but the unspoken tension that made this joke funny was that as a British archivist I might, on the other hand, prove that they weren't all British. Questions about family history were immediately associated with the threatening questions of bureaucracies, and when I asked them I took on the guise of an official coming to check out their credentials.

The second kind of response was to general questions about people's lives. As soon as I asked 'So tell me about your life and work', people would respond immediately with 'I have the certificates and passes to prove it', adding quickly afterwards, 'or I used to, they're lost now.' Not only was I a bureaucrat, but I was someone who could only be interested in the verifications of official documents. I will discuss these conversations in more detail later, but all I want to express now is how much family history in this context was permeated with a documentary logic and a tense sense of bureaucratic authority. These experiences pushed me into thinking about official archives and family histories not as containing alternative tales of the past, but as *intimately interrelated with each other*. I become interested in how public archives interrupted family histories and how potentially family histories might interrupt the narratives of archives, not as alternatives to them, but in a complex dialogue with them.[4] In this paper I will be exploring these issues in

[4] My analysis of these conversations and the nationality files has been inspired by the materials themselves, but also by *The Trotter-Name*, a novel by an Anglo-Indian author, Allan Sealy (1990). In this book Allan Sealy writes a fictional history of an Anglo-Indian family. The narrator of this story is Eugene Aloysius Trotter. Eugene earns his living by making convincing copies of 18th and 19th century miniatures, of an authentic school of his own invention, the Kirani School. These 'fakes' end up in museums with authoritative labels and high price tags. In the novel the reader encounters a series of invented colonial documents which seem authentic in their language. But they refer to nothing but the fictional reality of an imaginary family's history. They provide proof for a plot that is revealed at the end of the novel as nothing but a tale of an 'Agent and guide' who exclaims, 'what to do. People want to hear stories about places so you make them up. .so if they want all that bloody past-fast rigmarole I give it to them...tell you the truth I made up the whole lme—I mean joining up all those Trotters like that.. . Funny bloody story more holes than cheese in it.' Included in this novelistic archive of fake but 'authentic' documents are real colonial documents that are rendered untrue by the narrative. What I found helpful about this novel that mixes the genres of history and fiction is that it is formed in a particular Anglo-Indian space of loss and longing. Anglo-Indians, it suggests, can only ever write or talk about family history from within an unstable space, where truth can only be told by faking documents and lies are told by the documents of official national archives. This novel directed me towards thinking about how this relationship was produced.

relation to a specific archive, the East Indian Railway's nationality files from 1927–50 and the Anglo-Indian family histories I listened to that often seemed haunted by its documentary presence.[5] As we will see, the story of this archive and the historical moment it grew out of explain much about the troubled relationship between Anglo-Indians and documentary history. This historical moment also sheds some light on the genealogy of 'community' in Indian civil society. Overall, this material reveals much about the terrain of history as a whole and how we, as anthropologists, might approach it in order to tease out the connections between the practices of public archives and private narratives of national belonging and citizenship.

I

Disembedding family history: Determining 'nationality' and 'domicile' in the East Indian Railway Nationality Files 1927–50

The East Indian Railway Nationality Files began to be kept at a time when the old racial distinctions of railway service had been removed. Since the 1890s the Indian National Congress had campaigned against racial inequalities in pay, conditions, and promotions in all the public services including the railways. In response to these campaigns in 1924, the Lee Commission on the Indianisation of the Public Services ruled that racial distinctions in pay and privileges should be abolished. All employees would now be classified by domicile, Asiatic and non-Asiatic, rather than by the assigning of a racial or national identity. In the letter of the law these new rights of domicile were apparently based neither on *ius sanguinis* or *ius soli*, but on place of education, ownership of property and the maintenance of kinship links by marriage and sentimental relations to a country. Those of non-Asiatic domicile would be eligible for the privileges of higher pay, a Sterling provident fund and periodic furloughs in Europe, and would have their passage back to Europe paid on retirement.

[5] In thinking through these issues around archives, longing and desire for origins, I have borrowed some ideas from Derrida's *Archive fever* (1996). However, I want to make clear from the outset that implicit in my argument is a criticism of Derrida's vacillation between whether the archive is a particular site, or whether the archive is just an instance that proves his notions of effects that are produced by writing itself. I want to emphasise that I think that we need to ask historical questions about the variable effects of specific archives, not build a general theory of the effects of writing as Derrida seems to do.

In 1927 the East Indian Railway began to implement the recommendations of the Lee Commission. Up until that point employees had been inspected by a medical officer at the time of employment and their nationality—European, Anglo-Indian, Indian Christian, Domiciled European or Caste—was discerned from their appearance and demeanour and then noted down on their history sheets or personnel records.[6] The Agent of the East Indian Railway now decided that the nationality of employees could be accepted according to their own statement of affiliation without any certification on the part of the Chief Medical Officer, although to make sure that employees told the truth about their nationality, they were threatened with dismissal if they lied about it. Workers already on the payroll would still have their nationality fixed on the basis of the decision of the medical officer at the time of employment. However, the domicile of workers was to be determined on the basis of forms and supporting documents in line with the Lee Commission reforms. These forms were filled out by all new and existing employees. As I will show, this apparently liberal move had three important effects on the relationship between Anglo-Indian railway workers and their family histories. First, it intensified investigation into the domestic affiliations of Anglo-Indian workers with final authority being attributed to documentary evidence of their movement through state institutions. Secondly, it drew family histories into a troubled, unequal and inconclusive relationship with documentary archives. Thirdly, it created acute indecision among Anglo-Indian railway workers and bureaucrats about the nature of nationality and identity, whether these rested as visible signs on the body, in sentiments, or in documentary proof. Overall, the practices of this archive disembedded Anglo-Indian family histories, making the bureaucracy and its documents the arbitrator and guardian of their origins.

The new emphasis on proof of domicile in determining access to European benefits drew Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European railway workers into a peculiar and expanded web of criteria that designated affiliation. The questions on the domicile form, which all non-Indian employees were required to fill out, were unstinting in their demand for information. They went as follows:

> When and where was your paternal grandfather born? What was, or is, his profession or occupation? Where was he when your father attained

[6] The lack of a category of 'Indian' and its substitution by a caste designation in this list of nationalities is of course a classic colonial reading of Indian society—lacking in unity and simultaneously divided and unified by a logic of caste.

> his majority? Is he alive? If not, when and where did he die? Was he ever in India? If he was, where was he educated? Where was he married? In what capacity did he come to India? How often did he leave or has he left India and for how long? Was his wife ever in Europe? If your grandfather is dead, had he retired before his death? If so how long did he remain in India after retiring? Had he ever any immovable property in India?[7]

It asked similar questions about the worker's grandmother, father and mother and the worker and his wife themselves, adding a question about whether anyone in the family had ever corresponded with any relatives or friends in Europe or whether they intended to retire to Britain. These questions demanded proof of private affiliations ratified by state documents and private correspondence, giving documents a primary material power to prove social relationships and origins. At the bottom of the form was a list of documents that has to be provided in order to confirm the answers to the questions. The responses of workers to these questions reveal the inequalities produced by the intensified demands of the bureaucracy. Questions were repeatedly answered with a simple 'not known', 'as far as I know', ' we cannot yet afford property in Europe, but we intend to buy it', and stories of failed intended trips to Europe that were aborted at the last minute by lack of funds or sickness.[8] One worker wrote, 'In regard to questions 1a, b, c, 2a, c, d I beg to state that on the death of his mother my father, who was very young, was taken over by his grandmother and, therefore, cannot give the information called for.'[9]

These domicile forms traced the circuit of workers through civic and state organisations in India making personal genealogies, life histories and kinship a matter of public institutions and records. From these forms railway officials drew up authoritative kinship diagrams tracking nothing but the traces of the state in the lives of railway workers. The family history of Anglo-Indians and Domiciled Europeans was being disembedded from a domain of family stories and bodily signs of belonging into a public sphere of records. Simultaneously, the Indian ancestors and relatives of Anglo-Indians and domiciled Europeans were rendered irrelevant to this public archive and became a private and disabling secret. In particular a failure to produce documents or a silence about the origins of female relatives were always interpreted by officials as a sign that the

[7] 9/8/16, AE File 80 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 118.
[8] AE File 80 (Calcutta. Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 109
[9] AE File 80 (Calcutta Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 118

worker had disabling kinship connections to India (this was explicitly called a 'disability'). Indian railway workers, on the other hand, could simply assert when asked by the officer employing them whatever identity or caste they chose to with no requirement for proof. Indian family histories were left in the domain of private, unproblematic links between body, place, and family stories of lineage.[10]

The new regime of documentary proof generated a flow of protests from Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European workers. The files on nationality and domicile in the East Indian railway began to fill with their requests for change of status. If you disputed the decision of local railway officials, then you were referred to the authority of the Agent, who issued strict instructions that he should be the final arbiter in disputes. If you could win him over with your written requests, then you had the hope of having your private sense of origin and identity ratified. Since the railway administration instructed its employees that the 'onus of proof' rested with the individual worker, the nationality archive at the East Indian Railway grew, expanding in size and authority. It drew into its files not just the decisions of medical officers, but the private correspondences of deceased grandparents, the testaments of magistrates, the assertions of parish priests, the protests of the Anglo-Indian Association, and the opinions of divisional managers on the nationality and domicile of subordinates. In 1929, we find in its files the following list of documents offered to prove the nationality of Mr. Kennedy, an inspector of works:

Records offered to prove Nationality

1. Extract from parish register books of St. Johns Calcutta, Mr. E.J. Simpson married Miss L. Wyatt on 5/1/1865
2. Burial certificate of Mrs. L. Simpson
3. Letter no. 6 dated 29/9/26 from R.J. Twyford and Co., solicitors to Mrs. S. Kennedy
4. Burial certificate of Mrs. L. Simpson, widow of Captain T.R. Simpson R.N.

[10] From the little evidence I have of forms filled in by Indian workers, the kind of designation they wrote in the space assigned for nationality/caste was rarely what colonial authorities or anthropologists would describe as a caste category. Usually they wrote down regional place of origin, religion or language. This would tally with Chatterjee's arguments about the multiple uses of jati and designations of community available to Indians outside the restrictive logic of colonial bureaucracies. This point is, of course, that this kind of improvised elasticity of designation was being undermined for Anglo-Indians by the procedures of the Domicile forms.

5. Death certificate of Mrs. F.A. Wyatt
6. Chart dated 10/12/29 showing the antecedents paternal and maternal of Mr. Kennedy's mother.
7. Letter dated 3/1/1817 from Mr. G.N. Wyatt to Fanny Wyatt
8. Letter dated 4/4/1813 from Mr. G.N. Wyatt to Fanny Wyatt
9. Letter written in 1817 by A. Wyatt to Fanny Wyatt.[11]

The railway bureaucracy replied with its own archive stating that Mr. Kennedy was declared to be Anglo-Indian at the time of his appointment and that throughout his entire record he was classed as such. The Agent added that this file contained no papers relative to the representation Mr. Kennedy's father is said to have made in 1906 protesting against his classification as Anglo-Indian. Therefore, his nationality could not be altered, especially on the basis of private correspondence that contained 'no relevant facts at all.'[12] Mr. Kennedy was asked to produce more evidence of his domicile. In these files a public documentary history of Anglo-Indians, Domiciled Europeans and Indian Christians was coming into being. They become related to an archive and began chasing documents through all the institutions of the colonial state, trying to prove their right to be part of an archive of nationality.

The inequalities of this hunt for documents become apparent from the efforts in 1934 of Mr. Hampton, a foreman in the wagon repair shop in Ondal. He sent to the Agent extracts from the Sind Civil List from 1872, a newspaper cutting from 1863 showing the commission of the Peace issued and directed to officers serving in the Punjab, and a marriage certificate and death certificate to prove the European credentials of his father. He provided evidence from the Government Directory and Gazette of India that his three brothers were classed as Europeans in the Public Works Department, Burma, Indian Educational Service, Bareilly, and Commissioner's Office, Jullandhar. But he regretted he was unable to obtain any papers for his mother because she was born in 1844 at Calcutta, and there were no papers available before 1860. His claims about his brothers were tested by the railway administration, but their requests to the relevant government departments were met with the reply that all the relevant papers had been 'weeded out'. Mr. Hampton was then asked to prove his mother's nationality. He produced a letter from the Senior United Board Chaplain in India, Kasauli, certifying that to the best of his knowledge she was the daughter of French parents.

[11] 28/11/29, AE80 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway). 12
[12] Ibid : 14.

Mr. Hampton added to this a promise for a certificate from the doctor who attended to his mother in her last illness, but he asked for patience from the authorities: this would take time because he did not know where the doctor was now stationed. The Agent then asked him to fill out a domicile questionnaire and Mr. Hampton continued his finally inconclusive quest for his own history.

By 1949 the size and authority of the railway's archive of Europeans had grown so much that it became itself the object of requests for proof. Mr. Ford, the son of a railway guard, wrote to the General Manager of the East Indian Railway requesting 'any information you may have on record in support of my father's status of nationality as a European English subject'. He needed to submit these records to the United Kingdom Citizens Association, in response to their demand for documents supporting his registration as a citizen of the United Kingdom.[13] The administration replied: 'at this distant date the records he asks for are unavailable.' Mr. Ford was left dispossessed of his 'origins', longing for them, referring in his final letter to his father's claim that his status was recorded in the 'minute no. 464 of the Agent dated Friday 23 October 1917 that at the request of the General Traffic Manager, endorsed by the Acting Chief Medical Officer that the nationality of guard W.J. Ford had been changed from East Indian to European (vide correspondences ending with Chief Medical officer's letter No: 5786, dated 6th October 1917).' Mr. Ford was finally left with nothing more substantial than this memory of a line from the minutes of a Board meeting.[14]

I suggested earlier that the founding of this archive marked a shift from an emphasis on nationality and race as signs on the body to one of domicile proved by state documents. But if you examine in more detail the ways in which decisions were made by railway officers and the claims of railway workers, it becomes clear that something much more problematic was taking place. Railway officials were working with contradictory ideas of belonging; one based on domicile, one on nationality. The idea of domicile depended on a notion of identity as dependent on your behaviour during the course of your life and your class position. To attain non-Asiatic domicile, the most important criteria were that: you were educated outside India; had married in Britain; owned property in Britain; had visited Britain often; corresponded with relatives there; and had an emotional connection, which meant that you intended to return

[13] 23/9/47, AE80/3 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 267.
[14] Ibid · 268.

there at retirement. Important as well was the fact that you were in India merely in the exercise of a profession. A purely economic, unsentimental tie to India disembedded you from belonging in that place. What domicile was about, therefore, was a *class position*, whether you could afford to maintain some kind of connection to Britain. But the railway bureaucracy was still also working simultaneously with the idea of nationality as an essential part of the body. When railway workers signed on for employment they were still required to fill in their nationality/caste. They were placed in different sections of the railway gazette and official lists according to their nationality/caste. Nationality was something quite different from domicile; it was an inherited feature marked on the body by skin pigmentation and cultural habits, and recorded in baptismal documents.

In practice when railway officials made their decisions on cases, they veered between these two criteria, trying constantly to bring decisions on nationality based on inheritance and the body in line with their decisions on domicile based on documents and class. Often, when documentary evidence was unclear, the Agent would order the railway worker concerned to pay a visit to the Chief Medical Officer who would decide the matter on the basis of appearance. The railway bureaucracy's continuing indecision about whether bodies or documents guaranteed nationality and domicile made the body simultaneously an indisputable and treacherous witness. This is captured by a memorandum from the Chief Medical Officer to the Deputy General Manager in 1940, which was sent to try and determine the case of a railway guard who had been designated Anglo-Indian when he was first employed by the railways, but was now challenging the decision thirty years later:

> The physical examination upon which this classification used to be made is a most fallacious one and depends entirely upon the presence, absence and degree of pigment over certain areas of the body. I have known of cases [of] dark Europeans and fair Anglo-Indians and Europeans respectively and I am aware of at least one case in which one brother was classified as European and another as Anglo-Indian. After the age of 35–40 physical examination is almost useless, except in extreme cases, as pigmentation increases with age, and other factors such as pressure and exposure to temperature have to be reckoned with. Driver Brinkhurst must be between 50 and 55 and unless he is very dark, it will be impossible for me to arrive at any conclusion. The

> Medical Officer who examined him on appointment was in a much better position to arrive at a more accurate conclusion than I can possibly do now, and his classification should stand.[15]

This memorandum was used in many other cases as evidence for the uncertainty of physical proof of nationality. Yet Agents and railway officers continued to be unsure about the primacy of written or physical evidence as proof of family origins.

For example two brothers, Mr. C. Stanhope Jones and Mr. V. Stanhope Jones were inspected by a medical officer at Lilloah in 1929 and the medical officer decided that: 'From personal appearance and from the examination of their maternal and paternal records, I am convinced that both these brothers are Europeans. I am informed that one of their brothers, who is on the Burma railways, is under the European leave rules.' Their record was altered accordingly by the controller of stores.[16] The Agent protested against this decision taken without his authority and referred the Jones brothers to an interview with the Chief Medical Officer, who in turn argued that the case could be decided just as well by the head of the department as by a medical officer. The secretary to the Agent insisted that the Chief Medical Officer should certify them, and he decided that they were Anglo-Indian. Similarly the Agent's request for the inspection of a Mr. Whaley's European nationality by the Chief Medical Officer was met by the assertion from the doctor that: 'There are no particular signs known to medicine which are diagnostic of pure European parentage; the chief mechanical engineer is just as competent as I am to decide this question,'[17] However, the Agent insisted on a decision from him. All requests from employees who started work under the previous medical regime were greeted with the response that there could have been no possibility of the original diagnosis of their origins by the doctor concerned having been wrong.

This bureaucratic vacillation left employees confused in their representations to railway officials. They supplied documentary proof from private doctors of their mother's or father's domicile, confusing requests for changes of nationality with changes in domicile, demanding that since their domicile has been determined as non-Asiatic, how can they not be classified as Europeans. For example Mr. Newham, an apprentice signal inspector, protested his classification as of Asiatic Domicile

[15] 8/2/40, AE80/1 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 17

[16] 27/7/29, AE80 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 20.

[17] 5/9/29, AE80 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 24.

stating: 'Your place of abode may change but it does not alter the blood that flows in the person, and hence the nationality is the same.' He added that: 'I am a European, moreover since both my parents are of European parentage and my mother has relatives now in England—owners of property—her grandfather, a military veteran buried in the Residency in Lucknow, was European...regarding my grandfather...he was a pure Irish man and people to-day in Dublin will link his name and affairs till he came to India.'[18] The railway authorities responded to his outrage, which combined a logic of blood, family history, nationality and domicile as indeterminate as their own, by calmly informing him that: ' A domiciled European is of Asiatic domicile but that this has nothing whatsoever to do with nationality.'[19] The confusion of railway workers about what the signs of nationality and identity actually were echoed the railway bureaucracy's own continuing confusion about the relationship between bodies and documents, inherited essences and behaviour, racial identity and class position. In this confusion between nationality and domicile, being and becoming, race and economic status, we have a continuing refusal by the railway authorities to admit that their judicious neutral administration of racial and national connections was all about relationships of class and power. We also have an example of the recurrent and still problematic contradiction between nationality imagined as genealogical belonging and as a civic, political right gained through residence, not family origins.

Given that the process of proving your identity or challenging your assigned domicile and nationality was invasive, tortuous and inconclusive, we might ask—why did railway workers participate in this process at all? Cases would take an average of two years to resolve and only in a handful of cases did it result in the change that the worker had requested. Railway officers had a simple answer for this question. Workers were seeking to improve their economic position illegitimately and to gain access to Non-Asiatic privileges of leave, higher rate of pay, pensions in Sterling rather than rupees, and a passage back to Britain on retirement. This economic interpretation works for some of the requests, but not quite in the way railway officials saw it. From the perspective of railway officials, workers who were really Anglo-Indians or Indian Christians were trying to disguise themselves as something quite else—European or Anglo-Indian—that they really, essentially, were not. Workers, on the

[18] 9/5/40, AE80/3 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 35B
[19] 6/6/40, AE80/3 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 53.

other hand, were willing to strategically abandon an apparently essential identity, understanding that there was nothing vital or essential about this status, that all this discussion of belonging was just an economic game. Railway officials refused to admit the permeability of the system they were involved in: that it enabled the transubstantiation of apparently essential identities.

But alongside this strategic adoption of a past for economic reasons, something else was going on. Many of the unsuccessful claims of workers are permeated with a sense of sadness and frustration about their family histories being drawn into a documentary regime. And many workers wrote to request a change of status, for example from Indian Christian to Anglo-Indian, which would *not* affect their economic situation. Attributing a purely economic motivation for all the cases means denial of the power of this archive. What was at stake in many cases was the possibility of building a continuous public identity and life-story for yourself, your family and your children. Many of the requests from workers pointed out that their sons were classified differently from themselves in the public railway lists. Others had been classified as European or Anglo-Indian by other colonial institutions such as the army or in electoral registers, because these institutions demanded only proof of European parentage in the male line. The railway's criteria were more rigorous since you had to prove European parentage in both the male and female lines. Other contemporary definitions in the Government of India Acts for the purposes of drawing up electoral rolls (1919 and 1935) insisted on European descent only in the male line, as did army regulations during the First and Second World Wars.

Workers protested the fragmenting of their identities by these different definitions of 'Europeans'. For example, a Mr. Brinkhurst wrote in 1939 demanding that his nationality be altered to European: 'England and the Allies Sir, are at war to-day only because Germany deprived Poland of her birth right. If we are to take the action of England as sincere then Sir, you as British officers must admit that I have a right to fight for my proper place.'[20] He threatened the administration with the withdrawal of his patriotism in light of the insincerity of British officers and their refusal to allow him a 'place' of origin. Mr. Pedrick wrote in 1945 that he has been classified as a European British subject in the Regulation for the Registration of Engineering Powers Ordinance, but that he was classified East Indian in the Railway lists. He protested

[20] 19/11/39, AE80/1 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 122.

about this contradictory classification of his identity; 'It cannot be European for one purpose and East Indian for another and I wish you to please correct my birth right from East Indian to European and let me here (sic).'[21] After another similar application that cites the Government of India Act of 1935, the Agent called for an opinion about the definition of European Nationality under this Act. When he found out its definition he wrote incredulously: 'Then you might as well call 50 per cent of Anglo Indian(s) Europeans!'[22] Other workers were provoked by the Government of India Act on the Composition of Legislatures (1940), under which magistrates were given the authority to register people as European on the basis of documents proving their male line, to request a change of status in the railway lists. In all of these cases railway bureaucrats referred to their own archives as definitive and stated categorically that nationality 'cannot be altered merely on the basis of the fact that for certain other purposes the man has declared himself to be a European.'[23] The workers who wrote to the railway officials never forgot the power of the archive to define their public identities and determine the veracity of their personal stories. They demanded their 'birth right', after repeated rejections of their requests; asked how it could be that their brothers were classed as Europeans but they weren't; why their domicile could be changed to European, but their nationality couldn't. By writing to the railway bureaucracy, these workers sought to end the inconsistent ways in which their lives and relationships were enfolded into the classifications of colonial archives. They sought a seamless, public identity that could verify their private family stories. They wanted a final piece of documentary proof that would stabilise the disjuncture between their private family stories and their public identities. That it had become so important to close this disjuncture shows the degree to which the practices of the railway bureaucracy had disembedded the family stories of Anglo-Indian workers, and had brought them into a relationship with documentary proof. But, as I will explain, it also reveals much about the wider historical moment and the shape that community identities were taking in Indian civil society during this period. The genealogies of identity in the East Indian Railway nationality files turn out to be relevant for the tracing of the genealogy of the idea and practice of community in Indian politics.

[21] 14/3/45, AE80/2 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 159.
[22] 28/7/41, AE80/2 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 141.
[23] 11/1/46, AE80/2 (Calcutta: Agent's Record Room, Eastern Railway), 223

II

A genealogy of community: Political rights and family origins in Indian civil society, 1919–50

Although the longing for a public ratification of their private stories by the railway bureaucracy was a particular predicament for Anglo-Indians, it reveals much about the new politics of community rights and entitlement that were emerging in the period from 1919–47. It has long been a truism of historiography that the Montagu-Chelmsford electoral reforms in 1919, which created separate electorates and provincial legislatures, were motivated by a policy of divide and rule. Similarly, the agreement in principle to economic reservation for minority communities in the Simon Commission in 1928 and subsequent implementation of this in the civil services and railways, have long been interpreted as a strategy for creating divisions of interest. But what seems equally significant about this historical moment is that some of the measures introduced to calculate electoral eligibility and economic entitlements tied private genealogies to political rights. Genealogies and documentation were becoming significant in a new way to the arbitrations of the state. They could be used to prove the existence of an inherited substance within individuals, which they shared with other members of their rigidly bounded 'community', and that entitled them to political and economic rights. The nationality archive of the East Indian railway was just one of the many and more obviously problematic examples of this process. Most of the community claims, like that of the caste categories of Indian railway workers, appeared to be self-evident and did not generate inquiries or extensive archives. But the protests of Anglo-Indians in the East Indian Railway nationality files, who were caught between these emerging lines and left with inconclusive longings for their trans-generational essences to be ratified by a state institution, remind us that these communities were something new and different. This archive also shows that as communities emerged in the calculations of bureaucracies, they were tied to broader national identities—in this case Asiatic/non-Asiatic. The impoverished and divisive logic of this bureaucratic reckoning assumed that family histories could simply nest within the bounds of communities which, potentially, could then be associated with particular nations. But the objections of railway workers and the vacillations of railway officers show how inadequate and strange this bureaucratic reckoning was.

The peculiar nature of the political communities that emerged in civil society in the context of this bureaucratic reckoning is particularly visible in the shape taken by the Anglo-Indian Association from 1928–47. From the late 19th century, wealthy Eurasian professionals in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay had formed organisations to represent their interests to the government on issues of employment and education, and to reform their 'community' from within. From 1902–10 these organisations became more formalised with regular meetings, publications and branches across India in railway centres and major towns. They periodically cooperated in conferences on political and commercial questions with other similar associations such as the Marwari Association, Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, Central Mahomedan Association, and Calcutta Trades Association. Despite the acceptance in the President of the Imperial Anglo-Indian Association's annual address in 1902 that they should be politically unified with other Indians in their movement for free elective representation, this did not mean that members supported Congress politics.[24] Instead they sought to stall the process of Indianisation and objected to what they called the 'sometimes unconstitutional' methods of Congress. By 1928 most of these organisations were amalgamated under the leadership of Sir Henry Gidney into the Anglo-Indian Association, with headquarters in Calcutta. The introduction of limited electoral reforms, the rights given to minority communities in the Simon Commission, and the growing mass nationalist movement had completely changed the nature of the Anglo-Indian Association. In the pages of its journal and local meetings, there was now a self-conscious exploration of how to become a legitimate Indian community with political rights, which also had greater national loyalties shared with other Indians.[25]

Middle class members of the Anglo-Indian Association now concentrated an attempting to counter claims that they were inauthentic and unpatriotic. The link their arguments made between public, political, and private legitimacy reveal some of the assumptions that grounded the new natural boundaries of communities in civil society. They asserted first of all that Anglo-Indians were the legitimate offspring of Indian and British ancestors, casting off the common accusation that they were the descendants of illegitimate relationships between low caste Indian women and

[24] This historical summary is gleaned from the *Imperial Anglo-Indian Association report* from 1900–1912, Calcutta, National Archives.

[25] The following historical summary of the Anglo-Indian Association is from issues of *The Anglo-Indian review* from 1923–47, Calcutta, Anglo-Indian Association Archives.

low class British soldiers. Secondly, they insisted that they had a genealogical tie to India from the inheritance of the Indian bloodline of their ancestral mothers, which linked them to the national motherland. Sometimes they added to this that they were, in fact, the most naturally national Indian community because their families had their origins in all regions, castes and creeds. These lines of argument and the objections from other Indian communities that they sought to anticipate reveal the ties being made between genealogical and public identities. These meditations and assertions should not be seen as separate from the efforts of the organisation to acquire and guard rights to reserved jobs and voting rights. They were the new kinds of genealogically provable claims that during this period underpinned some forms of political rights.

Members of the Association also set about attempting to acquire the elements that Anglo-Indians lacked in comparison with other Indian communities. Local branches compiled Anglo-Indian anthems, histories and literary collections. They also began to dream of founding an Anglo-Indian agricultural village in McCluskiegunj. Although this project has been interpreted as an ill-fated, utopian, separatist dream, it was a scheme that was designed to finally link a mobile labour aristocracy to the soil of India. Anglo-Indians would put down agricultural roots in a cross between a homeland and village-home. Becoming a community with political rights now not only required genealogical reckoning of legitimacy, but also some kind of territorial foundation.

All of this might seem to be an interesting improvisation that used bureaucratic notions of genealogical entitlement for another end, or that successfully countered other Indians' delegitimisation of Anglo-Indian claims to belong. But the institutional formation of this community turns out to have been as impoverished as the bureaucratic practices of the railways. From 1933 the Anglo-Indian Association used its local district branches to inspect the genealogical credentials of prospective members: people who asserted they were Anglo-Indian on electoral rolls and for the purposes of gaining reserved posts in the government services. 'Vigilance committees' were set up to police membership of the community, which borrowed the documentary practices of the bureaucracy and enacted these at the local level. The majority of Anglo-Indians did not accept this restricted notion of solidarity based on documentary proof of legitimacy. Once the Association introduced these procedures, they had tremendous problems in recruiting members, especially from among railway workers. There was a constant crisis of funds, as subscriptions remained unpaid, members left the organisation, and people chose not to join. Fifty-one out of fifty-nine of the district branches of the Anglo-Indian Association were

in railway colonies and were staffed by one or two members, mainly railway drivers or travelling track or ticket inspectors. But these branches could not generate an enthusiastic membership among the Anglo-Indian labour aristocracy. Perhaps they were unwilling to participate in a community that defined its solidarity using the narrow bureaucratic practices of inspection of documentary credentials and kinship relationships. Sometimes doubts about these even surfaced in the pages of the Anglo-Indian Association journal. For example, in 1938 Kenneth Wallace, an inspector of schools, wrote that people who wanted to join the Association should just be asked to declare that they were Anglo-Indian rather than be asked to produce proof of their origins. This way the organisation would be filled with 'Asil' or genuine Anglo-Indians. He added that it was just a class prejudice that led the Association to exclude poor Anglo-Indians as 'Indians' (Wallace 1938). But this eloquent plea did not alter the activities of the association, which continued to build an exclusionary, class-inflected form of political community on the basis of genealogical reckoning. In general, the attempt of the Anglo-Indian Association to build a community sadly echoed the impoverished notions of community practised by the colonial bureaucracy in nationality archives such as that of the East Indian railway. Although political leaders like Gidney claimed to represent Anglo-Indians and negotiated rights and privileges for them, poorer Anglo-Indians seemed ambivalent about, or disinterested in, this new politics.

Yet Anglo-Indians who did not subscribe to this class-inflected bureaucratic notion of political community found it difficult to engage themselves with other forms of politics. The exclusion of Anglo-Indians from nationalist and union agitation had many causes. One of these was their structural position as defenders of colonial public space, for example, the compulsory enrolling of all Anglo-Indian railway workers in the Auxiliary Defence Force, which often brutally suppressed strikes. Another was their economic position as intermediaries who implemented the orders and hard work regimes that Indian workers were protesting against. But Anglo-Indians were by no means the only Indians who enforced the colonial rule of law or economic hierarchies. What made it difficult for Anglo-Indians was the elective affinity between notions of jati, community and nation. One of the great challenges for Indian nationalism during the 1920s was to overcome restricted notions of community grounded often in colonial administrative practice and to formulate a common political destiny for a unified Indian 'people'. Obviously the forms that solutions took—from communist inspired union strike action to Nehru's vision of communities unified by the developmentalist state—were diverse and had very different kinds of political effects.

However, common political action, whether at the local or elite levels, was often grounded in metaphorical and analogical leaps built around the term jati. Chatterjee has explored the elasticity of this term as a potent coeval source of resistance to the restricted use of community by the modern state. But, as we will see, this term was unfortunately not elastic enough to include Anglo-Indians. Both jati and the 'community' measurable by the colonial state were by the 1920s operating with a shadowy genealogical imperative. In fact, from the perspective of Anglo-Indians, it is hard to tell the difference between them. The jati/community of Nehruvian socialism, Gandhian swadeshi utopianism, or of railway unions seemed to them merely to domesticate the fundamental assumptions of bureaucratic archives such as that of the East Indian Railway nationality archive.

Anglo-Indians had long been a problematic 'community' for the Indian middle classes. For example, from the late 19th century, Eurasians and Indian Christians in Bengal had been labelled with the term *Tash*, which suggested that they were low class, low caste, cheap imitations, too Anglicised, rootless and sexually disreputable.[26] But from the 1920s, as a result of the debates on the Indianisation of the public services and general salience of the category of community in politics, Anglo-Indians became visible as an area of inquiry. Articles in *The modern review* speculated about the damage that was done to the cultures of both India and Britain by their mingling in the homes of Anglo-Indians.[27] Mahalanobis carried out mathematical calculations on the physical features of Anglo-Indians to try and determine the effects of race mixing (Mahalanobis 1922). This combination of cultural nationalism, race theory and class distinction played constantly with the metaphor and multiple meanings of jati. Petitions from railway workers during the same period record their protests about being supervised by Anglo-Indians, calling them, for example, 'third-class Anglo-Indians of dome breed.'[28] As a result of these anxieties about Anglo-Indians, when their political leaders sought alliances with the Indian National Congress, they found out that their community was not quite respectable or Indian enough to be included. For example Moreno, a leader of an Anglo-Indian radical political group, sought a rapprochement in conversations and letters with Gandhi from 1925–29. Gandhi reassured him that Anglo-Indians were

[26] See Sukumar Ray's poem *Tash Goru*, published in *Sandesh* and *Abol-Tabol*, 1923.
[27] See 'What is an Anglo-Indian?', *The modern review*, Vol. XXIV, no. 203 (Nov. 1923).
[28] 26/4/34, AE763/6 (Calcutta: Agents' Record Room, Eastern Railway), 115.

as welcome as all other minority communities within the Indian National Congress. However, Gandhi was outraged that Anglo-Indians defined their identity through their inheritance from a European ancestor, saying that as long as they did this they could not be included within the nationalist movement. He also suggested that they lived a false mode of European existence in railway colonies and that their moral and physical tastes showed signs of degeneracy. Moreno wrote back that these attitudes from nationalists were what made it so difficult for Anglo-Indians to feel part of the political movement for independence (Gandhi 1970: v. 27, 183–84; v. 41: 330–31). From the perspective of working-class Anglo-Indians, there was little difference between the disenfranchisement they faced in relation to the new genealogical reckonings of community, whether these were by railway officials, leaders of their political groups, or by other Indians. All of these demanded proof of their private affiliations and family histories, which they often could not provide. In particular they were now faced with an impossible choice. To make their family histories into public identities they had to document their European affiliations for institutions like the East Indian Railway or the Anglo-Indian Association, but this, according to Indian nationalists, disqualified them from belonging to the Indian nation.

During the 1940s Anglo-Indian leaders such as Frank Anthony did manage to build a working relationship with the Congress. By this period the notion of India as a conglomeration of competing political communities was firmly entrenched as a natural state of affairs. Nehruvian socialism sought to create a state that would arbitrate between these rights. It was on the basis of this vision that Anthony succeeded in negotiating minority rights for Anglo-Indians, guaranteeing their preferential employment on the railways until 1960, reserved places in English Medium Schools, and nominated M.L.A.s in the Provincial and Central legislatures. At Independence many of them celebrated along with other Indians, and theoretically they have taken their place among the other now naturalised communities of interest in India. Yet this has not affected the attitude of other railway workers to Anglo-Indians, or their quotidien experience of belonging. The best way of conveying this is to tell you the response of a recently retired railway worker, Mr. Basu, to my questions. His grandfather and father had worked on the railways. Mr. Basu had worked on the Eastern railway in the workshops from the age of sixteen, rising to the level of a workshop foreman. Since the 1950s he had lived in the colony. When I asked him about the history of the colony itself, he carefully distanced himself from its story. He said, that unlike

the Anglo-Indians who had lived there in the past who had no culture, no history and traditions, and only bad morals, he had his *desh*—his village home. The railway colony had not affected him at all and it was not how he wanted to situate his life-story. His identity came from outside the railway bureaucracy in that village he hadn't lived in for forty years. Playing with the double meaning of *desh*, as village home and country—India, Mr. Basu reveals the final effects of the Railway Nationality archive and the historical moment it emerged in. They made Anglo-Indians into a profoundly un-Indian, rootless community. Caught between the genealogical reckoning of the colonial bureaucracy and the imagination of jati by other Indians, their predicament reveals much about the genealogy of community in Indian civil society. Next I will turn to the impact of this history on contemporary accounts by railway Anglo-Indians of their family histories. Although it might be more proper to say I will discuss how the traces of the East Indian Railway Nationality archive and the wider historical moment it grew out of still produce an unresolvable longing for a coherence between family history, national histories, community affiliation, and bodily identity among railway Anglo-Indians.

III
Traces of disappearing documents and Anglo-Indian origins

In my conversations with Anglo-Indian railway families, constant references to documents and certificates made the traces of the archive ever present in their absence from the actual possessions of the family. As I mentioned at the beginning of the paper, whenever I asked Anglo-Indian railway families to tell me the story of their family histories, they always began by mentioning these certificates, adding quickly and sadly that they didn't know where they were now. Even more strikingly than this, the whole form that the telling of family or biographical history took was structured by the procedures associated with the railway's bureaucratic archive. To give you a sense of this, I will describe the accounts given to me by two Anglo-Indian women, Antoinette Fanthome and Marigold Wilson in response to the question, 'Tell me about your life'.

Antoinette Fanthome lives on the second floor of St. Vincent's, a Catholic house of charity and orphanage, that is now an old people's home. She is one of the more prosperous occupants who can afford

a partitioned space of her own filled with heavy wardrobes, trunks, dressing tables, and photographs of an old Scottish boyfriend in uniform and her friends who now live in Australia and England. When I asked her about her life, she told me that she was born in Lucknow in 1922 and educated at St. Mary's Convent, Nainital. She told me that her father was Irish, but they weren't like those glorified Anglo-Indians who were fair and looked European and tried to pass themselves off as Domiciled Europeans. Both her father and she herself worked on the East Indian railway, and she proudly informed me that her father had a British Indian passport and could get assisted passage to England under the Lee Commission. Her parents sold their house three times, planning to go to England, but she took fright each time and persuaded her parents not to leave. She explained that this fear was due to the fact that she knew that in England they treat 'coloured' Anglo-Indians very badly and she could never belong properly there. When her family were in the railway colony at Waltair, Antoinette even sold her prized grand piano and booked passages, but she lost all of this because she decided at the last minute not to go, afraid that she was not white enough to be accepted in Britain. She proudly told me that her family tree, all of it, is in the Lucknow library at Kaiser Bagh. She used to have a copy of it, but she tore it up because she was the last in her family. In any case, once Independence came, she had no use for it.

In her account, Antoinette Fanthome simultaneously points to the importance and irrelevance of the traces of colonial bureaucratic history on her life. This bureaucratic history appears in the form of genealogies, passage concessions, 'Irish' origins, the names of educational institutions and archives. This history appears as what I should know about her, what the railway knew about her family, what the archive in Lucknow can verify. But she also sees this history now as the irrelevant imprint of the colonial state on her life. She destroyed her family genealogy when India achieved Independence. She also felt that however many documents she possessed, they were irrelevant because they could not return her to a 'home' in England. Antoinette attempts to rebuild an ancestral home by referring to the railways' documentation that imprinted British identity on her male relatives, but she also feels that her own female, dark body betrays such attempts, preventing her from claiming her connection to Britain. She remains surrounded by an inconclusive hiatus between her private memories, her body and public forms of history.

Marigold Wilson, a widow of an Anglo-Burmese railway inspector, has her home in a four room flat in an old Anglo-Indian para near Park

Circus (now a predominantly Muslim area), sharing it with one of her two daughters and one of her five sons and his wife and two children. The family all grew up in the railway colonies at Addra and Anara. Marigold first came to Addra when she was six years old. Before that she lived in Secunderabad with her father and mother, where her father worked in the railway workshop. Her father's older sister took her to Addra to live with her and her European husband who was on the Domiciled European scale as a steam engine driver. Her brother later joined her and they were both given educational privileges by the railways because they were adopted legally by her aunt and uncle. Whenever she went back to Secunderabad to visit her parents, changed by her attendance at Loretto Entally convent school and railway colony life with her Domiciled European uncle, her mother would say, 'Oh Marigold, she's a lady now. She won't do any work'. Sometimes she says she 'lets the cat out of the bag' that she can speak Tamil fluently, which was her language in her parents home. She is out of touch with her sisters. She adds, 'it's like partition between them'. Their uncle's brother went back to England to live in a Kentish town. She told me Keith Fletcher, a cricketer who she said is listed in that biography of cricketers which came out recently, must be a relative because he is from there too. They used to correspond with the brother's two daughters, but they lost touch. And now, because she only 'thought selfishly of herself' and not her 'children's' future', she has never managed to get any evidence of adoption. Even her father-in-law, she added, emigrated to London in 1948 and asked them to come along after they had settled down, but she selfishly didn't want to leave her people, her family. She could even have got the chance to go to Britain when her uncle went on his six months privilege leave as a Domiciled European, but she always refused saying, 'Oh no I'm too black, even you will look down on me and treat me differently there. I don't want to go.' Because she had no proof, all the property in Britain went to the brother when her uncle died. If she had her husband's documents from the regiment, she says, she could 'come to the rescue' of her children because he was in the A.F.I. during the Second World War.

Marigold self-censors her own and her family's movement from India because of the witnessing of her body, which meant she could never become a British citizen or be at home there. She sees herself as having profoundly destroyed the possibility of any future without the possession of documentary traces of the archive. Her body's non-reference to Britishness disenfranchises her from possession of the archive, but she constantly refers to the existence of this history and its teleological

entailments. She refers to the criteria of domicile forms (which her uncle and husband would have had to fill out), correspondence, property, army service, adoption documents as absent presences in the archive of her life and the future of her family. Her conversation also circles around the disjuncture introduced into her homeliness with her parents and sisters by her adoption by her Domiciled European uncle and residence in the railway colony, and the English medium education that made her Tamil language a secret and introduced the national boundary of partition in her family.

Both Antoinette Fanthome and Marigold Wilson recounted to me life stories suffused with the non-referentiality between their bodies and the contents of archives. The presence of vanished documents left them unbound from the national narratives of Britain and India, alternately seeking and rejecting the possibilities for home provided by the 'house arrest' of the archives that produce such narratives. Sometimes they rebuild an ancestral home by references to documents that imprinted British or European identity on their male relatives, but they suggest that their female, dark bodies betray them.

IV
Ghosts of history

Ghosts and graveyards recurred in Anglo-Indian railway family stories, particularly in the railway colony at Kharagpur. These ghosts of relatives or of forgotten Anglo-Indians hang around the domestic spaces of families, drawing them to graveyards of history. The themes of these stories emphasise that these people from the past can't rest either because they have been abandoned by other Anglo-Indians, or because they are troubled by unresolved disputes about rights guaranteed by documents. They are spectres of histories untranslatable into the present, or of intimate connections that can't be made real in documents.

I first met Mr. Vanjo, a retired railway inspector, in the Catholic graveyard in Kharagpur. He was washing his wife, Milly's, grave and was beginning to burn candles and incense on it. He told me he came to talk to her every day, that he might be mad, but he does it. His mother and brother are buried there too. He deplored the state of the graveyard, saying that it was hatred that made the Indians smash the angels' faces and take pieces off them to prop up paan stalls.

Several months later as I was sitting in Mr. Vanjo's three room flat with two of his three daughters, the family began to talk about Milly's

ghost. She calls to Mr. Vanjo from the graveyard, drawing him on his daily visits. She appeared to his grandson on his birthday. He was playing outside, alone, because according to his father he is a lonely chap since there are so few children who speak English in the neighbourhood, and suddenly he called out 'Milly's smiling from the clouds to me'. Later his grandson looked out of the window and said, 'Milly's come.' That night he dreamt that he was playing with his grandmother all night. Mavis, one of Mr. Vanjo's daughters, told me that she tells her nephew that Milly has gone to England and he replies: 'When you go to England, take me with you or else you'll forget me like Milly has.' Mr. Vanjo added that she comes to him at night and watches him in his bed. He said that she can't rest; she haunts the family because of the controversy over Mavis's marriage. Mavis is married to an Anglo-Indian man she met on a trip to Britain, who was once married to one of her aunts. The Anglo-Indian community in Kharagpur is scandalised by her choice, accusing her of arranging the marriage for the purpose of a visa, and criticising the 'incestuous' nature of her relationship. Because of the protests, the local church in Kharagpur, where she had been baptised and confirmed, initially refused to perform a ceremony there. She wrote to the Bishop in Calcutta and they finally got permission. Mavis has been trying to get a visa for two years to join her husband, but the situation has been complicated by the 'evil wishers' sending a letter saying it was an arranged marriage to the British authorities, who are now investigating everything. She protested that it is unfair that the British government even asks them for all their private correspondences and cross-questioned her in a preliminary visa interview, leafing through their love-letters. Mr. Vanjo added, 'if they have no honour, just like the railways, no discretion, you might as well just show the letters to them.'

The Vanjo family's web of private relationships and personal history is suffused by the violences of the public spaces of community, neighbourhood, church, graveyard and nation, inherited from the colonial and post-colonial state. These recurrently demand proof of Indianness and Britishness, and insist that there is no dissembling of intimate relationships. Milly may be in Britain, but she has only got there through death and the potential forgetting of her family. But she cannot rest; she travels through the family's lives disturbed by the non-translatability of emotions into the documentary verifications of the state and the divided Anglo-Indian 'community,' which like the Anglo-Indian Association, only makes its presence felt in the scrutiny of private relationships.

A ghost haunts the Campbell family, who have lived and worked on the railways for two generations. They live in 'Dolly Villa' built by an Anglo-Indian family on the outskirts of the colony just before Independence, in an area where many such families settle on retirement. The ghost appears to Mrs. Campbell and her niece. First she saw someone walking past the window. Once, she tried to get up at night and she was thrown onto the bed three times. She often feels someone pressing down on her chest. Her niece added to the conversation that she saw a woman, an Anglo-Indian woman, in a short sleeved dress by the window. Mr. Campbell diagnosed the origins of this ghost. He explained that it is the ghost of a woman whose family left her behind in the care of some other Anglo-Indians when they went to Britain at Independence. She was handicapped. They mistreated her, beat her and shut her up in a room with no food and she starved to death. Her evil presence was still there. She was locked up in the room next to Mr. and Mrs. Campbell's bedroom, which is all shut up now; no one uses it. Mrs. Campbell keeps the spirit away by having a mass said in their bedroom by the local priest and she puts holy water all round the room to keep her out. But they are trying to move again, since they have only had bad luck since they moved there.

This ghost is the trace of a history that, because of the unequal procedures of the railway archive, can never be turned into Indian or British national history. The family that left their disabled relative behind are representative of the ways in which Anglo-Indians, pushed by the railway bureaucracy to long for British origins, have abandoned and betrayed a handicapping Indian past. But this ghost of the abandoned and now impossible-to-assert Indianness of Anglo-Indians cannot be completely exorcised or 'shut up' by Indian and British national archives, but returns to press down on the Campbell family.

V

Archiving bodies

The East Indian Railway Nationality archive was constantly troubled by the treacherousness of bodies. Officials were chronically uncertain about whether they actually referred to nationality and domicile. Anglo-Indian railway workers writing to it and trying to meet its criteria were also uncertain about what it was about their bodies, behaviour, memories and histories that could prove their identity. In the railway colony of Kharagpur today, Anglo-Indian railway families constantly worry

about the archiving power of appearance, costume and behaviour. This instability is perhaps even more intense now that the railway archive can no longer be appealed to even in order to resolve issues of belonging. In the absence of documentary proof of origins and no caste designation, the quotidien performance of identity becomes all-important.

In Kharagpur Anglo-Indians were fascinated by both the dangers and the liberating potential of disguise. Anglo-Indians regularly hold a fancy-dress party called a *pagal gymkhana* (or the club gone mad) in the railway institutes at Kharagpur and elsewhere. During the *pagal gymkhana*, Anglo-Indians take on the identities of cowboys, nabobs, Muslim rulers and British gentlemen. Men dress as women. Children go as 'Daddy's sins', wearing packs of cards and alcohol bottles. People dress up as typical Anglo-Indian dishes such as rice and meat ball curry in yellow *pagri* and *lunghi*, their skin representing the balls of beef and the yellow clothes saffron colored rice. This is a particularly funny image because it plays with the contrast between Anglo-Indians' pretensions to be British, their hybrid typical dish and the 'Indianness' of their skin colour and dress. Everyday jokes about the *pagal gymkhana* are common. These jokes emphasise that this apparently exceptional event of dressing up according to your desire for a public performance is not the exception but the rule of all Anglo-Indian and other communities' claims to identity. But these events are a source of anxiety too. One woman told me that she doesn't let her sixteen-year-old daughter go to them because she will be tricked into associating with people who have disguised their real identity, saying: 'The bottler caste, the one that trades in old liquor bottles, and the fruit seller castes, dress themselves up. Marina wouldn't know they were just fruit sellers from their looks and they would take her outside and make trouble with her.' This anxiety about a lack of fit between appearance and real identity reappeared as a constant refrain in conversations. In particular people worried about whether I was talking to real Anglo-Indians, adding that many so called Anglo-Indians were Indian Christians who had just stumbled across a name in the graveyard and started wearing frocks. But their habits might give them away as merely 'Upma' (a south Indian dish) Anglo-Indians, who betrayed their south Indian Christian origins by their enthusiasm for 'non-British' food. The fascination with disguise plays with the instabilities between appearance, family history, habits and identity that obsessed the Railway Nationality archive. But it also re-emphasises the treacherousness of appearance in order to reassert the boundaries between different kinds of people.

In Kharagpur, the archiving power of bodies as the repository of family history is also problematic. It is constantly interrupted by an instability between habits, origins and appearance. When I asked Mr. Vanjo about his family's origins, he told me that his father's father was Dutch and his father's mother was Portuguese Goan, but that his family were really British; they just came out as mixed up combinations in the same family. He added: 'Look at my own family. Myself and Mavis and my other son have nice coloured eyes and looked British, but my other daughters, Lolla and Karen, are all dark and swarthy.' His assertion of his essential Britishness, archived selectively in his eyes, continued, and he explained that he only ate British food, just rice and dal for lunch and in the evenings bread, '*paratha* as they call it'. Hope Dover, a widow of a railway driver in Kharagpur, archived her family selectively as well, saying that her 8-year-old son named Tarzan hardly looks like her son, adding:

> He's so fair, just like a European. He looks like my aunts and cousins who live in London and Canada. He doesn't like rice and dal. He will only eat bread. We tell him when he is naughty that he's not really our son, that I found him on the maidan and brought him home. We tease him that he is really a foreigner and we should send him abroad, and we will if he continues this way!

But this essential foreignness is not a lasting quality; habits and behaviour interrupt it. Hope Dover later told me that I was becoming too Indian looking, 'all thin and black', questioning my ability to retain an essence archived at the heart of my body. All these comments and conversations show the chronically uncertain relationship between habits, bodies and costume, and the history and kinship they are supposed to refer to. This slipperiness between bodies and archives of identity means that among Anglo-Indians, there is often great emphasis on the performance of appropriate 'British' behaviour. For example, one woman told me that whenever she took her children around to her mother-in-law's house, her husband would beat her when they got home because their children had not behaved with 'British' etiquette. In Anglo-Indian railway families, the imprints of the bureaucratic archive and the ghostly presence of this colonial archive, render bodies the most definitive and most unstable referents to a family and national origin. Anglo-Indians use all the metaphorical resonances of jati deployed by other Indians in an attempt to assert signs of genealogical origin, But, unlike other Indians, they can never finally anchor their claims in either their bodies or in a caste identity or documented point of origin.

VI
Beyond the archive

Whenever I look over my argument above, I am struck by a sense of claustrophobia. In my description, Anglo-Indians seem unable to escape the national archive of the East Indian railway and unable to enter the stories of community and nationality current in contemporary India. Someone who once read this paper referred me to Borges' story of the library of Babel. Once I read the story I understood why they had done this. Borges describes how outside the library, which is seen as the universe, epidemics and suicides decimate the population and young people prostrate themselves before books and kiss their pages even when they can't read them, all of them rendered phantasmal by the knowledge that everything real is inside the library. So to end my paper I want to discuss moving beyond the archive. I will discuss this in two senses: how Anglo-Indians move beyond the logic of nationality of the railway archive, and how anthropologists can help historians to move beyond the enclosed universe of the library.

One way in which Anglo-Indian railway families move beyond the logics of the railway archive is by interpreting caste and national identities as merely related to economic status and patterns of consumption. The best way of conveying this to you is to tell you the words of a song that Gary and Carol Wilson sang to me. It was written by their uncle and goes to the tune of Harry Belafonte's 'Oh to be in England':

> Oh to be in England now the spring is here
> Oh to be in England drinking English beer
> Boiled potatoes, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding too
> That is what you always find upon a set menu
> They don't know that I could work an Anglo English Fry
> Tell me have you ever heard of snake and kidney pie
> British people watching television every day
> When the kiddies go to sleep they show the sexy play
> They don't know that washing powder selling on the screen
> Changes garments, clothings, skin into white like you've never seen

What this song suggests is that those who guard the archives of nationality and community don't know what Gary and Carol know: that skin turns white through certain patterns of consumption and behaviour. Garments, clothing, skin are just commodities made to signify certain things, whatever certain archives and documentary regimes say about

them. Gary and Carol, as they sing this song, are for a short while beyond the archive's logic of blood, belonging and history. They turn the economic accusations of British colonial railway officials against British whiteness itself. Rather than suggesting that it is Anglo-Indians who were driven by an economic rationale to claim British identity, they sing of a Britain in which white skin is something that can be bought.

Perhaps even more so than this economic critique of nationality and identity, the ways in which Anglo-Indians who married outside their community refound their origins expresses a refusal of the logic of the railway's archive. These marriages to Muslims and Hindus have always taken place, despite the Indian middle class resistance to such matches and colonial official's comparative legal and archival indifference to them. Without romanticising such marriages, I would like to describe briefly one couple, Abdel and Donna Ahmed, and how they located themselves anew in the alliance between their Muslim and Anglo-Indian families with the aid of a certificate. Abdel was a recently retired workshop foreman when I met him in Kharagpur, and his wife Donna had taught on and off in the railway English Medium School. They too insisted from the first time I met them that a certificate was important in their lives. After a while they showed it to me, hanging up on their bedroom wall. It was from the local Bengali railway workers association and went as follows:

> Shri Abdel Ahmed is widely known as Begum. It is not a strange exception that one such as Begum has sprung from nowhere, on the contrary, he has been born and brought up among all the people of India and knowing them all, shares sympathies and works for their greater benefit. An exemplary citizen, Begum has got free access to Church, Mosque, Gurdwara and Temple only due to his superb human friendships and his true temperament. Although he is from an Orthodox Muslim family he is married to a Christian lady. His life is an example of cosmopolitanism. Half India's problems would have been solved if the politicians, administrators, religious supremos could follow Begum's radical humanism.

Abdel and Donna had refounded their origins on a very different kind of certificate from that provided by the colonial archive.

As a more general conclusion, I would like to suggest that anthropologists are in an interesting position to help historians move beyond the archive. Anthropologists can contribute much to discussions of documents as material artefacts, and archives as bureaucratic institutions that spread their effects, sometimes even into the apparently most private

domains of family histories. My paper has been an exploration of how to relate these two apparently discrete spheres. It has been a particular story of how a colonial archive of nationality interrupted family histories, drawing them into a documentary regime, but also of how stories told in families interrupt the narratives of these public national archives. This kind of anthropological endeavour reminds us that the manufacturing of citizens by archives does not merely involve the production of national myths and representations through the medium of historical accounts. Public genealogies as produced by some archives have very material effects on the creation of links between nations, bodies and belonging. Although there is some historical work which would suggest that Anglo-Indians are not alone among Indians in their paradoxical relationship with a public archive, very little ethnographic work has been carried out which focuses on the relationship between people, communities and documentation.[29] Such work would shed a revealing light on the interesting but so far largely theoretical discussion of the troubled links between community, capitalism and nation in post-colonial India.[30]

A careful tracing of the production of public genealogies has also in broader terms the potential to allow the exploration of two things that have been long remarked on in the study of citizenship and nationalism. The first of these is the strange resemblance between nationalism and the affective structures of kinship. The second is the process by which the family is 'nationalised'. Balakrishnan (1996) is one of the more recent writers who has focussed on the analogy between the nation and family in order to explain the intensity of attachment to it. But an even more rewarding approach pushes beyond this analogical analysis to focus on the incorporation of families into national projects. For example, Balibar (1991) has linked the production of state public archives of descent in France to the dissolving of kinship frontiers and private genealogies. He argues that this move leads to the emergence of an all-encompassing sense of belonging to a French national race. My paper builds on all of these arguments in its description of the creation of a

[29] I am thinking here of the historical work on kinship and family law such as that by I. Chatterjee, *Gender, slavery and law in colonial India* (1999), the more theoretical work on community and kinship by V. Das (1994), and of course the large body of literature on reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

[30] This is a theme which has of course been pioneered by P. Chatterjee in *The nation and its fragments* (1993). This paper is an attempt to historically and ethnographically explore the actual contours of their relationship in a particular governmental and 'community' setting

public genealogy in the colonial East Indian Railway Nationality Files, which reverberate in the contemporary public life and domestic spaces of Anglo-Indian railway workers. But what my material shows particularly clearly is that the nationalisation of the family and the emergence of public genealogies do not smoothly produce a new coalescence of bodies, nations, documents and domestic behaviour. The East Indian Railway archive represents a moment in the history of the troubled relationship between civic entitlement and genealogical community. In this moment the profound contradiction inherent in the notion of citizenship as both a civic, political right and as an ethnic or racial genealogical history grounded in the family and the body comes to the fore and intensifies. The colonial and post-independence history of communities and nation in India and Britain has not succeeded in overcoming this contradiction. In both places, but with very different entailments, civic entitlement always seems to have the ghost of genealogical histories of communities hovering around it.[31] For contemporary Anglo-Indians, this ghostly presence created by the practices of an archive is not just a theoretical dilemma, but an everyday predicament.

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[31] See my book *The jodu house: Intimate histories of Anglo-India* (Roychowdhury 2001).

Economics and other social sciences: An inevitable divide?

Bina Agarwal

The divide between economics and other disciplines is only partly based on fact. In large part it is also based on misconceptions. Some of these misconceptions exist in the minds of economists, others in the minds of non-economists. Both add to the divide.

I

Some misconceptions among economists about other social sciences

A common misconception among many economists is that while economics uses a quantitative approach, other social sciences basically use a qualitative one, and that the two approaches are in opposition; indeed, that the former is superior. In fact, many non-economic social sciences also use quantitative methods, while some economists also use qualitative ones.

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Many political scientists and sociologists, for instance, extensively use quantitative data and statistical analysis. A review by White (2001) of two recent issues of the *American journal of political science* showed that over one-third of the articles used mathematical modelling similar to that found in the *Economic journal* or the *American economic review*; 80 per cent used some form of regression, including logit analysis. Similarly, 10 out of 23 articles in two recent issues of the *American journal of sociology* were found to have used some form of quantitative analysis. Again, demography is essentially quantitative, with a strong mathematical tradition.

In fact, quantitative and qualitative analyses need to be viewed as complementary rather than in opposition. Political scientist Robert Putnam (1993), for instance, while propounding his concept of social capital, both described and sought to quantify it, as well as statistically test its links with regional variations in Italy's economic development. Elinor Ostrom (1990), another political scientist, frequently uses quantitative techniques in her work on common pool resources, while also drawing on qualitative information. There are several other examples.

There appears to be, however, an interesting difference in this regard between Indian social scientists and many of those in the West. Indian political scientists and sociologists tend to be less quantitative than their American or British counterparts. In other words, the methodological divide with economics appears to be greater in India than elsewhere. And it is becoming increasingly so as economics in India becomes more like that in the West, while other disciplines remain more rooted in the Indian tradition.

Another misconception among economists is that economics is more rigorous than other social sciences, a misconception that arises in large part because many economists link quantitative analysis with rigour and qualitative analysis with its absence. This, again, is an unjustified assumption. Good ethnographic work in anthropology, for instance, involves a careful cross-checking of interpretations of what people say or how they understand their own and other people's worlds (Harriss 2001). Rigour does not come merely from using large data sets. Much depends on how a scholar interprets the data or takes into account evidence to the contrary. This is important in any good social science analysis, be it economics or any other discipline.

Equally important is the need to use anthropological methods for enhancing accuracy in gathering certain types of quantitative data. Anthropologists and nutritionists well recognise, for instance, that information

obtained from villagers can be affected by whom the researcher speaks with, the degree of trust s/he is able to establish with the researched, and sometimes even by the researcher's mere presence. For example, the accuracy of information on land ownership can vary significantly, depending on whether it is obtained on immediate entry into a village or after, say, a month's stay; and by a stranger to the community, or by someone familiar to the villagers. Similarly, in measuring the food intake of different household members, just the presence of the researcher in the kitchen can change consumption patterns (Chen et al. 1981). In both these examples, anthropological techniques, which place much emphasis on rapport and trust between researcher and researched, can yield more accurate data and hence make for more rigorous analysis.

Either way, the assumption that figures mean rigour is incorrect. Figures can hide many inaccuracies, while qualitative insights can be quite accurate. Here Amartya Sen's much quoted remark is a good reminder that it is better to be vaguely right than to be precisely wrong. Also, as one social scientist has remarked: 'Data will tell you whatever you want if you torture them long enough' (White 2001). Equally, the simplifying assumptions used in many economic models can reduce the relevance of their findings.

II

Some misconceptions about economics held by non-economists

Now, consider examples of misconceptions about economics held by non-economists. A major misconception arises from assuming that the work of all economists is alike; that they all use the same assumptions, methodologies and approaches. Many non-economists thus view all of economics as unduly narrow, technical, and often far from the real world. This is certainly true in some degree, but is true mainly of a certain type of economics. What critics have in mind is mainstream neoclassical economics, and especially that characterised by high degrees of technical modelling.

Heterodoxy within economics: In fact, economics is not uniform, and the divide between it and other social sciences narrows noticeably as we move away from the end of the range occupied by neoclassical economics, towards the other end of the range occupied by more heterodox economics, for instance, towards economics that uses more political

economy approaches—Marxist economics, institutional economics, feminist economics, and even some elements of ecological economics.

Interdisciplinary economists: Another misconception among non-economists is the belief that economists do not draw on other disciplines. (The reverse of this is the belief among many mainstream economists that economists who draw upon other disciplines are not doing economics at all!) In fact, many heterodox economists have drawn extensively on other disciplines. This has enabled them to open up new areas of thinking and to challenge assumptions in both economics and other disciplines. Consider some examples.

A number of economists have drawn on anthropological descriptions of the family to formulate alternative models and approaches to the household to those existing within mainstream economics. Mainstream economic theory has long treated the household as a unitary entity wherein resources and incomes are pooled, and household members share common interests and preferences, or an altruistic head ensures equitable allocations of goods and tasks. Most collective action literature is no exception in its assumptions about the household. In studying the effect of inequalities on cooperation in the management of common pool resources, for instance, the inequalities recognised stem entirely from *household level* heterogeneity in, say, wealth (or class), ethnicity, or caste. Typically, these alone are treated as potentially embodying a conflict of interest.

In recent years, however, virtually every assumption of the unitary model has been effectively challenged on the basis of empirical evidence, including assumptions of shared preferences and interests, pooled incomes, and altruism as the guiding principle of intra-household allocations. Gender, in particular, is noted to be an important signifier of differences in interests and preferences; incomes are not necessarily pooled; and self-interest resides as much within the home as in the marketplace, with bargaining power affecting the allocation of who gets what and who does what.

Among the factors that led economists to challenge the unitary household model, anthropological descriptions of households and data gathered by public health experts were especially important. The former alerted economists to the complexity of intra-household interactions, and the latter to certain types of basic inequalities, such as in food and health care between girls and boys within the home. Anthropological

descriptions of how men and women behaved within the home also alerted economists to the fact that self-interest and bargaining were as much a characteristic of family behaviour as of market behaviour. In recent years, a range of bargaining models have drawn on these descriptions to both challenge the unitary household model and to present alternatives, thus opening up a whole new area of research, and one with significant policy implications (see, e.g., discussions in Agarwal 1994, 1997; Folbre 1986; Haddad, Hoddinott and Alderman 1997; Lundberg and Pollack 1993).

Indeed, some feminist economics has gone further in pointing out that even the bargaining models have limitations, since they do not take into account the importance of social perceptions in determining economic outcomes. Hence, for instance, the fact that women get a worse deal than men within the home has much to do with the perception that women contribute less to the household than men because their non-wage work is perceived as less valuable than the cash-generating work done mainly by men. Perceptions, however, cannot readily be modelled, and call for a more qualitative analysis (e.g., Agarwal 1997).

Again, in the debate on the 'missing women' of South Asia (Drèze and Sen 1989), economists were first alerted by demographic data on female adverse sex ratios. Equally important, in trying to explain this phenomenon of female adverse sex ratios, they (myself included) drew on anthropological descriptions of cultural practices such as dowry as well as ecological variations in cropping patterns such as the rice/wheat divide, linking them with economic variables such as female labour-force participation rates (see, e.g., Agarwal 1986a; Bardhan 1974; Drèze and Sen 1989). In fact, anthropologist Barbara Miller was amongst the first to highlight the link between female adverse sex ratios and factors such as dowry and female labour participation (FLP) in her book, *The endangered sex* (1981). Dowry has both a cultural and an economic dimension; FLP, again, varies with ecology and culture.

Similarly, in my work on gender and property rights (especially land rights), I drew substantially on anthropology, as well as law and history, to move well beyond the narrow understanding of property rights that characterises discussions on this subject within mainstream economics (Agarwal 1994). For instance, economists think of property rights largely in terms of incentives, investment and efficiency. But property has many other dimensions. Economically it is also linked critically to physical well-being and a reduced risk of poverty. In addition, it has legal, social, political and symbolic facets. Property ownership enhances

social status and political power. And its symbolic importance has much to do with why, in property disputes, people often spend more to defend their claims in ancestral property than its market value would justify. The economics literature misses most of these non-economic dimensions.

A second major discipline that has enriched heterodox economics is philosophy. One of the best-known exponents of philosophic approaches to economics is of course Amartya Sen, with his vast body of work on inequality, capabilities, ethics, and freedom.

A third discipline from which heterodox economists are increasingly drawing is social psychology. Using experimental games (the standard methodology of social psychology), a number of economists are today challenging the basic assumption within mainstream economics that human behaviour is primarily guided by self-interest, and some have demonstrated that altruism is as much, if not more, important. Also, economists Frank, Gilovich and Regan, in a 1993 paper in the *Journal of economic perspectives* set up Prisoner's Dilemma games among US university students to test differences in cooperation between those studying economics and other disciplines, and between women and men. They found (no prizes for guessing right!) that economists were much more likely to defect than non-economists, and men were more likely to defect than women. More generally, experimental games are increasingly being used by both economists and political scientists working in the field of environmental studies to test expected degrees of cooperation in the management of common pool resources (see, e.g., Cardenas 1999).

A fourth discipline from which heterodox economists have drawn extensively is agronomy. Here, I particularly have agricultural economists in mind. Indeed, good agricultural economics has always needed some understanding of agronomy, of cropping patterns, soil types, water tables, and so on. And this goes back a long way within economics. Today this knowledge can be put to good effect in examining the ecological implications of the green revolution. Also, agrarian studies and peasant studies have drawn extensively on anthropological techniques and insights.

A fifth discipline that heterodox economists have drawn on extensively is geography. For instance, studies of regional variations in poverty, sex ratios, forest cover and development indicators all have an important geographic dimension. But this gets so taken for granted that many economists in university centres of regional development who do such work might be surprised to have it characterised as interdisciplinary.

A sixth discipline with which heterodox economists are in constant conversation now is political science. This can be seen in the proliferating work on institutions and governance, in particular the governance of common pool resources and, of course, the contentious issue of social capital.

Finally, apart from the ecology related examples given above, if we specifically take the field of ecological economics, there are many examples of economists learning from and drawing upon the insights of several disciplines simultaneously. Cases in point are some of the writings of Pranab Bardhan, Jean-Paul Baland, Jean-Philippe Platteau, Partha Dasgupta, Juan-Camilo Cardenas, N.S. Jodha, my own 1980s work on rural energy and current work on collective action and community forestry, and so on.[1]

All in all, therefore, the divide between economists and other social sciences is based, at least in part, not on reality but on misperceptions. There has been a good deal of crossing-over into other social sciences among heterodox economics. At the same time, taking economists as a whole, we have not gone far enough. And part of the reason of course lies in the dominance of neo-classical economics over heterodox economics—a divide sustained by university departments, hiring and tenure practices within the academia, and strict disciplining within the discipline. And this is also driven by global politics. For instance, many Russian and Chinese economists today are being trained in neo-classical economics in Western universities.

Equally important to recognise, however, is that relatively few non-economists have drawn upon insights from economics. Those that have, tend to be particularly those working with quantitative techniques rather than with qualitative methods. Few in anthropology, sociology, science and law, for instance, appear to have examined the advances in economics, even heterodox economics. (Exceptions to this are to be found largely in the domain of feminist studies and agrarian studies.) So the divide, such as it exists, cannot be laid solely at the door of economists.

III
Advantages of crossing the divide

Why is it so important for both economists and non-economists to learn from each other, but especially for economists to go further afield in

[1] See variously Bardhan (1999); Baland and Platteau (1996); Dasgupta (1997); Cardenas (1999), Jodha (1986); and Agarwal (1986b, 2000, 2001).

this respect than they have done? Interdisciplinarity is important for several reasons:

- One, for allowing greater scope for originality in questions asked and methodologies used: some questions would not have been asked at all within the domain of mainstream economics. A case in point is the whole arena that I had mentioned earlier of intra-household inequalities, and of gender inequalities more particularly, both within and outside the household. Indeed, had I not ventured into other disciplines in my book, *A field of one's own* (Agarwal 1994), I would have had fewer new insights.
- Two, for the sake of accuracy: a case in point is the issue of deforestation. It appears difficult to go wrong on this one. But it has happened. In Guinee in West Africa, for example, ecologists, economists, scientists and others had long believed that deforestation rates were massive. But when anthropologists James Fairhead and Melissa Leach (1996) talked to the villagers, they got a different story: that forest area had in fact grown in parts and remained stable in others. They confirmed this from historical records and aerial photographs taken at different points in time. Their analysis revealed that many interested parties had kept the colonial narrative of rapid deforestation alive, especially forest officials who benefited from the replantation schemes, and the control they enjoyed over forest resources (which enabled them to impose fines on villagers caught breaking strict forest laws, to issue permits and licenses for timber extraction, and so on). In such contexts, while economists would be trying to use models to explain deforestation in Guinee, Leach and Fairhead showed that there was little to be explained in the first place.

  Again, in my ongoing work on local commons governance and community forestry, I find that institutions which appear to fulfill most of the conditions set out by a number of scholars as necessary for successful institutional functioning, are found to be far from successful when viewed from the lens of gender. This lens reveals many forms of non-cooperation, inequity and inefficiency (Agarwal 2001).
- Three, for challenging entrenched assumptions within one's discipline: for example, the standard practice within agricultural economics, when aggregating different types of labour, is to treat female labour time as half or one-third of male labour time, on

the untested assumption that female labour is less productive than male labour. When I was doing my PhD in agricultural economics, however, I questioned this assumption and found evidence in a most unlikely place: the agricultural engineering department of Punjab Agricultural University. Here, engineers testing the efficiency of use by men and women of different types of potato digging equipment found women to be almost three times as productive as men. I was thus able to justify treating male and female labour time as at least equivalent in my thesis (Agarwal 1983).

- Four, for explanatory depth: for instance, explanations of phenomena such as female adverse sex ratios, of gender or race discrimination in the labour market and so on, lie in the interface of economics and culture. Culture mediates many economic outcomes, as does ecology. For example, suppose you were to ask: why is female wage labour supply so much lower in northwest India than in the northeast, even though wages are so much higher? Economics would suggest that this has to do with leisure preference in the more affluent region. Anthropological studies, however, correctly locate it elsewhere, namely in female seclusion practices and social status issues in the northwest. And the women who are not visibly working are not enjoying leisure; they are slogging just as hard, but in their home compounds.
- Five, for more multidimensional richness and insight: the example of property rights and gender, given earlier, is a case in point. Another example is how notions of 'power' are treated within different disciplines: from Michel Foucault's writings (1981) and literary theory, to the economic formulations of 'bargaining power'.
- And six, for more appropriate policy formulation: policies based on narrow and sometimes false economic assumptions about human behaviour, about social dynamics, and about political imperatives have often proved grossly ineffective and sometimes positively harmful.

I believe there is a strong need to remove misconceptions about interdisciplinarity among both economists and non-economists so that doors can open for greater intellectual interchange and for working together more closely, even if disagreements remain on particular counts. For surely, disagreement, challenge and grappling with contradictions are essential to move knowledge forward.

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New from Sage!

Satellites over South Asia

Broadcasting, Culture and the Public Interest

David Page & William Crawley

The rapid spread of satellite TV in recent years has made a huge impact on the choice of viewing available to audiences in South Asia, not just in the cities but increasingly in towns and rural areas as well. This unprecedented boom has provoked a lively debate about the implications for nations, communities and cultures. Satellite TV respects no borders and it has posed a major challenge to the nation state and to national broadcasting systems.

This extremely well-written and comprehensive book tells the fascinating story of the opening of the skies, the media companies involved, the means of distribution and the reactions of viewers to the huge and growing menu of programmes.

David Page and William Crawley show that satellite TV has been instrumental in creating a new South Asian popular culture which has proved both attractive and controversial. They explore the implications of these developments for the national broadcasting cultures of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The second half of the book looks at the role of the state in the new media environment. It examines government responses to the challenge of satellite competition, efforts to evolve new regulations and the policies which continue to impede the effective decentralisation of the electronic media. The last two chapters assess where the public interest lies and outline policy issues for the future.

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RANABIR SAMADDAR, *The marginal nation: Transborder migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 227 pp. Tables, plates, maps, notes, references, index. Rs. 325 (hardback).

Outflows of labour, refugees and people in general within and across nations and continents have given rise to new population categories such as unwanted or illegal migrants, 'developmental' or 'environmental' refugees, or wanted skilled labour such as 'software coolies' and 'digital nomads'. Set in this context of globalised human flows across borders, *The Marginal Nation* is a learned, bold and provocative book, making for engaging reading. This is a book which some will find fascinating, others irksome.

The author contends that the received wisdom on migration—i.e., the demographic, neo-classical, or international perspectives—is inadequate for understanding the tension between the transborder flow of people and the idea of nationhood. Indeed, the major puzzle that the author sets himself is the juxtaposition of two opposed realities in South Asia—'that of the flow of the people, and of the contained and the bordered nation'. The basic message of the book is encapsulated in two related arguments. First, the 'nation' or the 'national identity' is neither a fixed, immutable category (it is being continuously redefined and redesigned), nor is it to be necessarily privileged over other associational ties and identity formations. Second, in a situation where what is at stake is not the quality of life but life itself, the insecurities of everyday life and livelihood overshadow concerns for territorial integrity and national security. Indeed, concern for sheer survival 'marginalises' the nation. Instead, what appears decisive in shaping migrations across the Indo-Bangladesh border are historical affinities, familial ties, strong transborder social networks and geographical proximity.

The author forcefully argues for the historical continuity of demographic movements in the entire South Asian region. The forcible partitioning of South Asia at the end of the colonial period and the resultant birth of a number of modern nation-states has surely restricted the historically easy movement of people throughout the region. Yet what was traditionally regarded as internal migration could not so easily be labelled, socially if not legally, as violation of state boundaries. On the contrary, the recent and long-standing social ties among people across the Indo-Bangladesh border have continued to grip their imagination, aspirations and everyday life, keeping the distant world of the nation-state at bay.

This yawning distance between statecraft and the demands of everyday life manifests itself through parallel but opposite forces at the border. The task of securing the border against infiltration emerges as the central concern of the post-colonial state in South Asia. However, as if to match this 'security-centric' mentality of the nation—what the author pithily labels as 'cartographic anxiety'—there lies the counter-reality of 'the porosity of the border'. 'The border exists,' the author claims, 'as a permanently fragile phenomenon' (p. 20). That is to say, the sheer logic of survival distances questions of legality and illegality, and people take up transborder trade as routine economic activity: in their normal-unexceptional lives, transborder interaction is a crucial means of support. Goods and vegetables cross the border; migrant workers find their way to brick-fields, fisheries and other workplaces, or to elite homes in metropolises as maidservants, commuting by the morning train known as 'the maidservant express'. Thus the 'anxiety' of the state and the 'unconcern' of disprivileged people coexist along the border.

Recurrent natural disasters like floods and famines, chronic ecological problems (such as land degradation, salinisation, desertification), ethnic conflicts, and the persecution of minorities have all impelled large population groups to move from Bangladesh to West Bengal, and in some cases subsequently to other parts of India. The author does not dismiss or trivialise the demographic or socio-political implications of such a large-scale migration, especially for the 'host'-country. Neither does he avoid an engagement with recent controversies surrounding the so-called 'number game of migration'. In fact, details on population figures and their decadal changes in selected border districts of West Bengal, changes in electoral rolls and ration card holdings, records of illegal entrants, figures of arrests made by the Border Security Force, details of overstay of Bangladeshi nationals in border areas, records of land sales, and other data have been marshalled with care and sophistication. The data seem to suggest that the population growth rates in the border districts of West Bengal are higher than the average for West Bengal as a whole during 1971–91. This difference, the author reasons, is attributable to migration—internal as well as cross-border.

Thus, the author suggests that the claim of significant cross-border migration is not totally spurious and, therfore, there is no room for a 'smug' view that border-crossing is a non-issue. But neither does he swing to the other extreme of an alarmist view on transborder human flows. The latter feeds popular apprehensions about an unimaginably huge influx of people from Bangladesh that is unsupported by hard evidence. While the book does not stray from solid facts, it intersperses review of empirical material with travelogue, history and ethnography. It leavens official data with detailed descriptions of the coping strategies of people on the move and is sympathetic to their special predicaments.

The author also speaks perceptively of the possibility of immiserisation, lumpenisation and victimisation of the migrants from Bangladesh in the resentful 'host' nation. Driven by vulnerabilities at the point of origin, they are likely to become victims of a new set of insecurities at the point of resettlement—as low-wage sweat labourers in the hands of exploitative employers, as 'captive vote

banks' in the hands of self-seeking politicians, or worse, as women refugees involved in the flesh trade. As the author rightly suggests, their right to life and livelihood and above all, their right to dignity as human beings, need to be respected even on foreign soil: we need to institutionalise the rights of immigrants.

It is here that I must confess to some doubt. What institutional mechanisms will help uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants? Will transborder social networks be adequate for the purpose? Or do we need, in addition, a broader institutional framework operating through the state system? Will privatised solutions replace an inclusive political order with some sense of collective responsibility both to citizens and aliens? Stated differently, the book seems to take a 'rejectionist' position vis-à-vis the nation-state in the South Asian region—the entity that is rendered marginal and irrelevant in the lives of people crossing borders. I find this position somewhat problematic.

Admittedly, one cannot afford an excessive confidence in governments as they have often failed to address people's concern for survival. But can we declare, without qualification, that the nation-state is wholly dispensable? In my view, this verdict is myopic. To be sure, the demands of everyday life stand in some tension to those of statecraft. But by the author's own admission, it is important for migrants to secure voting rights and ration cards 'here' in India and hence we notice a 'clamour for Indian citizenship' among Bangladeshi migrants.

Developing this argument, one may contend that political rights and state support are important to ensure minimum wages and social security benefits, to prevent human trafficking, to combat emerging communal tensions based on exclusive religious identities, and so on. Politics is not just an unfortunate happening which is best forgotten. However imperfect and insensitive the state laws may be, both 'natives' and 'aliens' have to rely on them in order to force the nation-state to be more inclusive, just and humane.

My second comment deals with a strange silence in the book about 'cross-border terrorism'. Since several parts of South Asia are wracked by cross-border violence, ignoring this issue will not help those of us, including the author, who would like to argue with the 'security-phobics'.

The issue of cross-border population flows in South Asia needs to be tackled both bilaterally and multilaterally, as the author also suggests. Concerned nation-states will have to initiate policies for the normalisation and improvement of cross-border trade and prosperity. Of course, economic integration at the border will somewhat modify perceptions of national interests. But if trans-national movements of goods and capital are not seen as short-circuiting national sovereignty, there is no obvious reason why movements of people will do so, especially when resources and wealth are highly unequally distributed across the globe. Such ground realities discourage an all or nothing position: the nation is neither 'marginal' nor 'supernal'.

It is important to read this book, engage with its arguments, and on occasion disagree with them.

Madras Institute of Development Studies MANABI MAJUMDAR

PRADIP KUMAR DATTA, *Carving blocs: Communal ideology in early twentieth century Bengal*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. 312 pp. Index. Rs. 495.

AND

THOMAS BLOM HANSEN, *The saffron wave: Democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999. vi + 293 pp. Notes, bibliography, glossary, index. $17.95 (paperback).

There is little that is common between these two books except that they refer to the same(?) object, namely 'communalism'. Hansen, however, prefers to call his object Hindu nationalism, unlike Datta, who insists on the name communalism. And as is evident from the titles, Datta deals with the formation of communal ideology in early 20th century Bengal, not the present day Hindu Right that forms the subject of Hansen's book. Datta's is a historian's work, meticulous in its archival references, while Hansen's is more in the nature of a political theorist's view—large brush strokes, backed up by interviews and fieldwork in Maharashtra. If Datta self-consciously seeks to defend a particular mode of conventional historiography, Hansen locates his work within a kind of post-structuralist terrain, with liberal doses of theorists like Lacan, Žižek, Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe thrown in.

Pradip Datta's historical survey of Bengal in the early decades of the 20th century presents a fascinating account of the formation of communal blocs among both the Hindus and the Muslims. It registers the anxieties of the rising Hindu elite at their 'dwindling' numbers encapsulated in the trope of the 'dying Hindu', consequent upon the number game inaugurated by the colonial censuses. Anxieties about lower caste secession from Hinduism, and about the growing population of 'virile' Muslims fuelled by the Hindu Mahasabha form one aspect of this formation of communal blocs. On the other side, the emergence of a Muslim communal bloc, reaping the harvest of what was also a peasant mobilisation of the Muslims ryots led by Pir Abu Bakr among others, forms the other part of his narrative. Declaring *go-korbani*, or cow sacrifice, as a matter of *jatiya gourab* (somewhat inaccurately translated by him as 'racial' pride), alongside a campaign against the Bauls as 'agents of the Suddhi movement', or the Muslim boycott of the immersion of Durga in Kushtea illustrate the rapid emergence of a communalist Muslim bloc. It is refreshing to read a secular history that does not simply repeat received wisdom about 'syncretic traditions', but also tries to grapple with the sectarianism that emerged from both sides, each reinforcing the other.

However, one cannot help feeling that Datta tries to push an intellectual position often against his own evidence, despite his insistence on 'the integrity of the past'. For instance, his very first chapter, which begins with the discussion of the idea of Hindus as a 'dying race', shows a clear, often direct relationship, to colonial censuses. But then he is quick to ask: does this foreclose the question of the colonial origins of communalism? His answer is that it does not. For, 'the

census explains only the stabilisation of these [Hindu and Muslim] identities...it does not explain how...relations of untouchability were tackled by upper caste representatives...(and) communalists' (pp. 24–25). I am not sure that anyone has ever argued that colonialism *explains* communalism. Here Datta seems to erect a straw man to knock him down. Surely to argue that colonial censuses made certain kinds of political mobilisations *possible* is not to argue that they *explain* every aspect of communalism.

Datta finds that such 'characterisations' of the colonial origins of communalism violate the 'integrity of the past' (p. 11). Though he is careful to distance himself from the positivist notion of 'facts' and offers the alternative notion of 'details', it is not quite clear what he means by it. In the absence of an elaboration of this idea, it seems but a change in nomenclature, especially where the insistence on the 'integrity of the past' seems to imply that there is still some way in which the past is accessible to the historian, untainted by the present. The persuasiveness of newspaper reports, he asserts, 'does not arise from obeying the autonomous logic of the discursive system'—'they have also to obey the explicit public commitment to verifiability of the reports' (p. 19). This is Datta's argument in favour of respecting the sanctity of the document *as document*—not 'mere representation'. Surely, in our own time we have seen how this 'public commitment' works! And surely, what holds for the newspaper, must hold for political tracts too. Yet, he mentions U.N. Mukherji's tract 'Hindus—A Dying Race' as making 'outrageously false assertions' like Muslims being more advanced in education (p. 32). Rather than talk about the 'integrity of the past', it might be more productive, in my view, if we try to match our theoretical frameworks with our own evidence.

In his introductory chapter, Datta argues that communalism is constituted by a certain 'lack' (p. 7): 'Unlike fascists, no one claims to be a communalist'. A minor oversight perhaps, that fascism or Nazism was a self-description before it became a bad word. Communalism was never a self-description. But Datta's idea of a lack goes deeper. It is bereft of content, which is why 'it encourages itself to be overwritten by other narratives' (p. 7). Communalism, he argues, 'lacked an elaborated ideology' and that 'even Hindutva of the post-1980s is marked by a relative absence of texts' (p. 14). I am not sure an absence of texts means an absence of ideology. More importantly, when Datta says that the defining feature of communalism lies in its 'unsayability', he makes two pretty breathtaking claims. First, there was the state's censorship, whereby colonial law proscribed the spreading of hatred between communities. Second, and more important, was a kind of 'self-censorship' arising out of the way 'communalism related to anti-colonial nationalism' (p. 14). How does this self-censorship manifest itself? As a lack of fit between its manifest discourse and what *we know it to be*? And how do we know it to be what it is? One answer could be: from its practice. But are we to take it then that its practice does not really make sense within its own manifest discourse? How does an average activist of a communal formation make sense of his/her actions? Does that manifest discourse stand separate from practice, without influencing it,

even constituting it? It does not suffice to say that 'self-censorship' was a consequence of the way communalism related to nationalism. What was that way? Why, if not for clearly ideological reasons, did communalists relate to nationalism in the way they did? One of the methodological problems with Datta's treatment of the issue is that he sees communalism as a *singular object*: Hindu and Muslim communalism must both be understandable with reference to some common set of characteristics. What if Hindu communalism is a close kin of Indian nationalism, as it indeed seems to be? Can we then see both 'communalisms' as constituting a single object? Many such questions remain unasked in Datta's polemical introduction.

Hansen reaches closer to the truth in this respect by clearly acknowledging the kinship between nationalism and communal ideology. However, his description of the early history of the Hindu Right is mainly a restatement of common knowledge. There is also a bit of carelessness in his description of Savarkar's criteria of being Hindu as being based on the idea of '"holy land" (*pitrubhumi*)' (p. 78). It is the second half of the book that is more interesting. Here, he relates the growth of the Hindu Right in the 1980s to 'two possibilities opened up in the political field', in the preceding period. He argues that the emergence of a 'majoritarian democracy' and corresponding forms of 'populist governmentality' instituted by the Congress regime, especially under Rajiv Gandhi's rule, came together with the proliferation of new demands and claims in an 'intensified democratic revolution'. The first part of the proposition relating to the role of new populist forms of governmentality in facilitating the rise of the Hindu Right, however, does not come across convincingly. It is merely asserted. The second part that relates to the anxieties of the vernacular elite, especially in the small and provincial towns, seems more seriously worked out, and backed up by interviews and reports of interactions with people.

In an elaborate and interesting discussion of the rapid changes in the 1980s, with regard to the explosion of the electronic media—the advent of satellite TV and video—and their almost immediate deployment in the electoral/mobilisational arena, Hansen points to two crucial factors. On the one hand, there is the rapid expansion of media publics well beyond the frontiers of the print-world, consuming everything from serialised versions of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, or *The Discovery of India*. On the other, with the massive growth of the consumer durables industry, what were till then 'symbols of urban modernity', namely automobiles, refrigerators, VCRs and colour TVs, became available to at least the rich in the rural areas. One would have expected that from here he would proceed to analyse the imaginative possibilities opened up before a large, hitherto excluded, populace, particularly in relation to consumption, contests over consumption, and the effect of these on notions of 'the good life', of nationhood and globalisation. Hansen disappoints in this respect too. One wishes he had concentrated on elaborating the second half of the book, which is really original.

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E. VALENTINE DANIEL, *Charred lullabies. Chapters in an anthropography of violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. xii + 252 pp. Maps, notes, references, glossary, index.

As the subtitle of this book suggests, Valentine Daniel uses 'violence' as a lens through which he views Sri Lankan society. Eschewing conventional ethnographic representation that would marginalise Sri Lanka and treat violence as a specific historical phenomenon to be explained in causal terms, he presents an anthropography of violence, that is, a description of the conditions that make it possible and the existential states that are associated with it. The violence of 1983 becomes a kind of originary event that leads Daniel to question the very premises of anthropology and its methodology. Questions are raised about the scale of anthropological studies—which assume a face-to-face community with stable spatial and temporal systems based on collective consent allowing for a certain fixity of representation—by the 'relentless presence' of violence that forces Daniel to move from place to place to ensure the anonymity of his informants who often risk their lives by engaging in the project of anthropology. In keeping with the nomadic nature of the object he describes, Daniel does not seek to give a coherent ethnographic account. Instead, each chapter in the book serves as a window that offers a different perspective on the events of 1983. Some of the chapters in the book deal with the issue of identity politics, and the conflicting views of history and heritage that provide foundational myths for Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus and seem to provide a genealogy for the events of 1983. Other chapters foreground issues of writing and representation, especially on the inadequacy of the ethnographic mode in addressing violence as a social phenomenon. Daniels goes to aesthetics, specifically semiotics, to make us aware of what is difficult in our intersubjective relations. He says that the aesthetic dimension points to the limits of comprehension in our sign systems and, therefore, it is only within such a framework that events of extreme brutality and even heroism can be described. I present two examples from the book. Guhanesan is a victim of torture by a Tamil militant outfit of which he was a member; he was punished for the crime of leaving the training camp for a few days to see his new born son, and he likens the pain in his body to a bubling candle. Daniel let this statement pass at the time of the interview, but was given a sudden insight when he attended a Catholic mass and saw the scores of candles that illuminated the statue of the suffering Christ. He noticed that the candles were swelling in blisters and was able to understand how the image of a bubbling candle could be juxtaposed with the body in pain.

The other incident Daniel describes was recounted to him by a Tamil school teacher. The train in which the school teacher was travelling was stopped by a Sinhala mob: 'I was hearing thugs shout in Sinhala, 'Get the Tamils out! Kill them! Kill them!'... I could hear passengers being pulled out and beaten .... The next moment, our door was being opened. As the thugs were climbing the steps of our compartment, this [Sinhala] woman suddenly gets up and comes and

sits beside me. I have my hands on my legs to stop them from shaking. She puts her hand on my left hand... The mob come and stick their heads through the window. Three young men get in. Look at us. Turn around and say, "No Tamils here"...' (p. 249).

Daniel does not try to provide an explanatory framework within which violence can be understood, but rather addresses a social life fundamentally altered by violence, to try and discover whether it can still reveal itself as intersubjective—as a shared sociality. For him, a search for a way of representing events that reveal a concern with shared sociality is the best way of doing an anthropology of violence.

Delhi School of Economics ROMA CHATTERJI

JOANNA PFAFF-CZARNECKA, DARINI RAJASINGHAM-SENANAYAKE, ASHISH NANDY and EDMUND TERENCE GOMEZ, *Ethnic futures: The state and identity politics in Asia*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1999. 209 pp. Tables, figures, notes, references, index. Rs. 195 (paperback).

Ethnic political movements are not uncommon in world history. These movements take the shape of armed conflict with the state whenever the ruling classes refuse to accede to their democratic demands. Exceptions apart, these movements are hardly ever directed against feudal and semifeudal forces, nor against imperialistic domination. Contrary to the expectations of sociologists—that ethnicity would disappear with modernisation and industrialisation, and intimate community would give way to impersonal society—ethnic activism and separatism have surfaced in a big way in post-colonial societies. Within the neo-Marxist framework, however, it is argued that development of capitalism produces the conditions for the rise of ethnic self-consciousness. Ethnicity is also considered an integral part of the uneven development of capitalism, a product of the bourgeois policy of dividing the working masses so as to extend the life of a moribund system. We find struggle for identities both in backward and advanced states.

In the book under review, Joanna Pfaff takes up the case of ethnicisation of politics in Nepal where, she argues, ethnicity is only a recent phenomenon starting from the political movement of 1990, often referred to as the 'struggle for democracy', which has made overt dissent possible by challenging the hegemony of high-caste Hindu groups. Here the Nepali state, which accepts cultural pluralism but also stresses the preeminence of Hinduism, has the potential for creating serious conflicts.

One of the cultural perspectives with reference to ethnic minorities is cultural pluralism, i.e., that there ought to be willingness on the part of the dominant group to permit cultural differences. Only this can provide true meaning to national identity in multiethnic societies through decentralisation. This perspective, however, ignores the specific character of national society, and unequal relations between the parts and the whole. According to Pfaff, ethnicisation occurs when ethnic groups emerge as collective political agents; but simultaneously, she

argues that ethnic tension in Nepal results not from an unequal redistribution of (domestic) societal resources, but rather from the unequal distribution of the state's resources received as international aid.

Sri Lanka is a case of bi-polar ethnic identity. According to Darini Rajasingham Senanayake, Sri Lankan Tamilians enjoyed disproportionately high representation in the colonial civil services and administration, but have been marginalised after Sri Lanka's independence in 1949. She locates the emergence of ethnic conflict in post-colonial Sri Lanka as an unintended effect of a process of trial and error. Ironically, the search for deeper democracy and representative government has increased the share of the Sinhala majority, both in political and economic terms. But the greatest harm done to Sri Lankan polity, according to Senanayake, was due to the politicisation of post-colonial Sri Lanka. Making ethnic distinctions into ends in themselves accentuates self-isolation. Ignoring other cultures impoverishes one's own group and portrays it differently from what it is in reality.

Ashis Nandy, in his paper on ethnicity in India, holds state secularism responsible for the present communal disharmony in India. According to him, Indian traditions and faiths provide much solid ground for the development of the multinational state that is India. Through empirical data on some Indian states where violence took place, he describes how various political parties use religion and caste for their vote-bank politics in the name of secularism. He is uncomfortable with Indian secularism as it is a foreign construct imposed upon India by the westernised intelligensia that came to power on the eve of Indian independence. Nandy says that since secularism was imposed from above, it did not find adherents among the Indian people, who are rooted in old traditions and faiths. Ashis Nandy seems to be trying to solve the issues of capitalism and modernity with primordial tools. He himself is unsure whether the problem of Indian governance, especially the problem of communalism, can be solved through the revival of traditions in today's globalised and internationalised context (p. 161).

The notion of tradition being an invention of modernity is correctly projected by Darini Senanayake. While assessing ethno-religious identity in Sri Lanka, Senanayake says that there has been a proliferation of logocentric histories projecting (a) the transhistorical existence of mutually exclusive groups, (b) the belief that different groups were more or less homogenous, and that Sinhalas and Tamils are not internally differentiated. Senanayake's argument about Sri Lankan traditions could very well apply to the Indian traditions that Nandy speaks of.

While tracing the ethnic divide in Malaysia, Edmund Terence Gomez holds cultural factors responsible, but also agrees that since the 1980s, economic factors have been at work, which affect the Bhumiputras (primarily Malays). Malaysia has three main ethnic groups, Bhumiputras (or ethnic Malays, who form the majority), Chinese and Indians. Here the Malays are in conflict with people of Indian and Chinese origin due to the continued use of Tamil and

Chinese languages in the educational system, and the consequent mobilisation of communities along ethnic lines. But Gomez admits that the global recession of the early 1980s badly affected the Malaysian economy, and was in turn reflected in educational and cultural issues. This demonstrates how global economic disturbances affect cultural currents within individual countries.

University of Jammu JAYARAM PANDA

UTSA PATNAIK, *The long transition: Essays on political economy*. New Delhi: Tulika, 1999. xv + 460 pp. Tables, notes, references, index. Rs. 595 (hardback).

Utsa Patnaik has written extensively on agrarian transformations in India for over two decades. The papers included in this book were written with a view to throw new light on the mode of production debate in Indian agriculture. She notes that the mode of production comprises the totality of a particular set of production relations. The historical transition from one mode to another results from the contradiction between a given set of production relations on the one hand, and developing productive forces on the other. Many contentious issues of agrarian transition have been discussed within this theoretical framework.

There are four sections in the book dealing with issues like neo-populist theory of peasant economy, farm size and productivity, differentiation of the peasantry, commercialisation of agriculture under colonial rule, famine, industrialisation and development in the former Soviet Union and China. The first two sections raise many theoretical issues pertaining to agrarian transition, and the next section presents a great deal of empirical data to prove some of the points made in the earlier sections regarding agrarian transition in India.

The essays in the final section compare the Indian experience with that of the Soviet Union and China. While commenting on neo-populist theories of agrarian change, Patnaik draws our attention to some lacunae in the theory. The laws of transition in the mode of production have been misinterpreted by Chayanov, who ignores the inequality in the resource endowments of cultivators. The neo-populist theory of demographic transition is essentially a non-dynamic one; it is a theory of cyclical movement within a given structure and does not explain how, if at all, the structure itself is changing. For lack of appreciation of the connection between capitalist production and technological change, the neo-populists failed to grasp the fact that capitalist accumulation in agriculture can also take the form of capital intensification on a given physical area rather than in an additional physical area alone. Continued development of capitalist production and the continued technical transformation of agriculture lead to qualitative changes in private landed property. Chayanov seems to have missed out on this basic principle. Like the neo-populists, the proponents of the feudal mode of production too ignored many basic issues in production relations. While critiquing Witold Kula's theory of feudalism, Patnaik notes that the category of ground rent and its relationship to profit is ignored. Kula also overlooked the

basic fact that under feudalism the extraction of surplus takes place on the basis of landed property and not, as under capitalism, on the basis of monopoly of means of production and subsistence used as capital. Both neo-populist theory and Kula's model of feudalism are discussed in the context of agrarian change in India. These broader theoretical issues do help in explaining production relations in Indian agriculture. Patnaik also examines the classical theory of rent and its application in India. With the help of Farm Management Survey data, Patnaik comments at length on the size and productivity debates in Indian agriculture. However, regional differences in agrarian trasition or farm size and farm scale could have been considered for an evaluation of trends in the country. Literature on the spread of new technology and capitalist development in Indian agriculture is replete with their adverse effects on the rural poor. The political implications of technological change in India could have been explored in some more detail in this book. Much has been written on the commercialisation of agriculture under colonial rule and the genesis of agricultural backwardness had been traced to the British period. A number of essays on this theme are found in the *Cambridge Economic History of India* (Vol. II, 1757–1970). Patnaik comments on the contributions to the volume and rightly notes that they failed to come to grips with the issues raised by nationalist and Marxist writers. Various contentious issues on agrarian transition have been discussed from a liberal perspective. In a detailed study on agricultural labourers in India, it is pointed out that new forms of capitalist exploitation have very little to do with peasant mobilisation and movements. This may be true in regions like Punjab and Haryana. Unionisation of agricultural labourers and agrarian unrest are noticeable in many parts of eastern and southern India. Some recent studies on agrarian change in these states have highlighted the emerging conflict in agrarian structure. The book also addresses issues relating to food availability, famine, and export-oriented agriculture in the context of agrarian change in India. Those interested in studying agrarian transition from comparative perspectives would learn a great deal from Patnaik's essays on the Soviet Union and China.

This is a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the political economy of agrarian change.

Delhi School of Economics ABHIJIT DASGUPTA

JANAKI NAIR, *Miners and millhands: Work, culture and politics in princely Mysore*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. 324 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. Rs. 450 (hardback).

This comparative study of the history of labour in the Kolar goldmines and Bangalore based industries in the princely state of Mysore under colonial rule is the product of the author's Ph.D. work completed at Syracuse University, USA. One of the distinguishing features of this study is the use of a wide range of very rich archival material, both official and private, as well as oral accounts and secondary sources—something which will make many Indian labour historians envious.

Within the structure of British paramountcy, the princely status of Mysore played a crucial role in shaping the unique history of its modern industry and labour force. This was a history inspired by Western models of industrialisation and economic growth on the one hand, and by attempts at state-sponsored industrialisation, on the other. The state administration and its bureaucracy displayed features of colonial governance as well as reliance on the monarchical modes of power in dealing with industry and its labour force. The author argues that this process was 'replete with contradictions, ambiguities, modest successes, defeats and disasters, and despite the Government of Mysore's best efforts, it remained partial and incomplete'. It is in this context that the author presents excellent analyses of the workers' politics of resistance, the continuities of old ways and the formation of new modes of social and cultural life in the alien environs of industrialising Bangalore city, and the harsh working and living conditions of the Kolar gold mines.

Several themes run through the book, notably the nature and structures of power through which the employers attempted to subordinate workers and control their work place as well as living spaces; and the mediation of the Mysore state between the contesting workers and exploitative employers based on the use of oppressive state machinery, as well as 'monarchical paternalism'. The state often intervened on behalf of the employers during their disputes with workers with personalised and often despotic modes of power, but also occasionally sided with the workers. The twin examples of the Dewan functioning like a labour commissioner during labour strikes, and at the same time the state's success in preventing the formation of trade unions till the 1940s, clearly established the pattern. The employers, mindful of this attitude of the state, often sought such interventions but also summoned the state's repressive apparatus to suppress labour unrest.

The book presents a very detailed and close look into the workers' world in Kolar mines and Bangalore city. One of the major themes is the politics of resistance. An interesting and novel feature of workers' politics was their ability to organise collective actions in the absence of any organised trade unions. Even after the formation of trade unions in the 1940s, the workers showed a remarkable degree of independence whenever the trade union leadership appeared to be out of tune with their concerns and wishes. The author successfully shows that economic issues alone did not determine the workers' politics of resistance in Mysore State, but that the questions of honour, dignity, injustice and solidarity were equally important to them. The book dwells on some of the important themes of Indian labour historiography—the nature of the relationship between labour politics and nationalism, and the question of representation. Here the findings are in tune with several other studies on Indian labour history—that there were periods of solidarity and disjunction between the nationalist movement and labour politics. The reformist upper class/caste nationalist interventions during strikes and periods of intense struggle often functioned as a constraining factor on labour militancy. On the issue of representation, there appeared to be several contending identities—the Dewan, the Congress, the communists and sundry good samaritan middle class

reformers—who took up the the 'cause' of workers from time to time. But the most remarkable feature, particularly in the Kolar mining area, was the emergence of an 'anonymous' and 'invisible' leadership from amongst the workers, who successfully organised strikes, held meetings and formulated demands.

However, some of the assertions in the book appear problematic. While explaining the reasons of labour stability in Kolar mines as well as critiquing the 'strain' in Indian labour historiography for 'valorisation of pre-capitalist identities of new proletarians', the author argues that the employment in mines was a liberating experience: '.. KGF represented as much a new ethico-moral horizon as a place of work, a site that offered opportunities for rethinking the relationships between work, wages and leisure'. A 'vision of plenitude' is what the life in Kolar mines held for the poor peasants from the agrarian hinterland. Whether the upward mobility of some workers in the mining town ever became a norm for average workers is not clear in the picture which emerges from the study. That the rural poor were worst off is an assumption which is at best speculative, since this is not proven anywhere in the book. Most employers in the plantations and mines in other parts of India constantly made the same assertion in the face of both official and public opposition to their extra-economic methods of recruitment in the labour catchment areas. The important question worth pondering over is whether rural poverty was the worse evil compared to the alien and impoverished slum life of modern industrial cities and mining complexes.

Finally, a small criticism of the organisation and presentation of the book. Despite its excellent treatment of the source material and analytical framework the mode of presentation, from a reader's point of view, is more in the nature of a fractured narrative. The chapters are replete with subtitles and sub-themes where information is often repetitive. However, despite these minor limitations, this study is a very significant contribution, enriching the historiography of Indian labour.

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KLAUS VOLL ,ed., *Against child labour: Indian and international dimensions and strategies*. New Delhi: Mosaic Books, 1999. xv + 360 pp. Tables, figures, maps, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 600 (hardback).

Ever since the 'global village' has become a reality, the 'Elders' of this village constantly worry about the health of the inhabitants. The definition of human development has become an all-encapsulating one that demands democratisation of the global village, for which human rights, gender equality, ecology and environment, peace, literacy and the abolition of child labour have emerged as major pre-requisites. In the revised and expanded definition of human development, abolition of child labour has become a major issue for the less developed countries in general and India in particular. International institutions, such as, ILO, UNICEF, UNDP, and UNESCO are working hard to remove the 'blot of child labour' from the face of 'Mother India'. The present book is part of this crusade against child labour, rightly titled, '*Against child labour*'.

There is no dearth of literature on child labour, but every book has its own place in the given spectrum. *'Against child labour'* is unique in many aspects. There are 30 contributors to the volume, each outstanding in their own area of specialisation. It is not simply the number of contributors that is important, but their varied nature, ranging from academicians to politicians, from artists to social activists, that makes this book a unique addition to the existing literature on child labour. It is not an easy task to bind such disparate contirbutions into a single theme. However, Klaus Voll, the editor, has been successful in establishing thematic unity without disturbing the flow of reading. With such a large number of contributors, it is not possible to review every article within the given space constraints, which allows only a summary of the important contributions of the book.

The book has been divided into four parts, each with its own introduction. Part I deals with the international and structural dimensions of the problem of child labour, which Kavita Sivaramakrishnan and Klaus Voll jointly summarise in the very first chapter. While highlighting the magnitude of the problem of child labour in Asia, they suggested that the dominant nations shun a paternalistic and unnecessarily moralising attitude towards less developed countries. Such a change in the attitude is important because, as Maneka Gandhi pointed out, there is child labour in England and Germany though 'it is diverted into other forms.' D. Thankappan highlights the miserable condition of child labour in the informal sector. Daniel Haas has suggested that the costs for the abolition of child labour by the year 2004 would be US$15 billion, to which all the international communities should contribute. In Part II, Manju Gupta and Klaus Voll have focused on Indian child labour. There is hardly any aspect which is left untouched in this rather long article. Besides locating the problem, they have gone into the details of causes and consequences of child labour, and also suggested possible remedial measures, particularly the strengthening of the school education system. There are many other contributors who have stressed the idea of streamlining our school education in order to wean away the children from the drudgery of labour. In fact, Part III is devoted to the practical steps that need to be taken to eliminate child labour. Here Neera Burra, relying on her extensive field work on child labour for the past decade and a half, has strongly suggested close cooperation among various government agencies on the one hand, and people's mobilisation and community participation on the other.

Part IV has nine appendices which cover almost everything available on child labour in India, including labour law history, 'Social clause', evolution of the child labour policy, the various government departments involved in combating child labour, and also a list of 'useful addresses'.

In brief, *Against child labour* is a compendium rich in information for academicians, social activists, and policy makers.

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MANJIT SINGH

UJJWAL KUMAR SINGH, *Political prisoners in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988. xvi + 293 pp. Notes, appendices, bibliography, glossary, index. Rs. 475 (hardback).

The book under review is an attempt to map the construction of the domain of the 'political' over a period of 100 years, moving from the colonial to the post-colonial context.

What is to count as 'political'? If to be political is to be 'national'—that is, a politics amenable to and accorded legitimacy by the liberal-democratic polity that the Indian nation-state constitutes—then the ethnic-national or extreme left mobilisations of today may not count as 'political' because they question the very notion of an Indian nation-state and are, therefore, not 'national'.

This book contends that the denial of political status to nationalists by the colonial state, and to ethnic-class mobilisations by the Indian nation-state, explains why the 'political' and the 'national' are in a sense as yet unresolved questions despite the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial setting.

The question of the political is addressed in the book through a reading/historicising of the modern Indian prison/prisoner from the 1850s to the mid-1970s. The prison becomes a crucial site for the colonial (not so much for the post-colonial) state to accord/deny a certain legitimacy to the nationalist movement—that it is political and not criminal activity through negotiations on granting the status of 'political prisoner' to nationalist leaders.

The treatment of the nationalists determined colonial perceptions about the nationalist movement: if nationalists were to be treated as 'political prisoners', it would mean acknowledging the nationalist movement as 'politics and, therefore, a legitimate challenge to colonial authority; if they were to be treated as criminals, the task of defining actions that were not 'typical' crimes became complicated, in turn affecting the evolution and application of penal strategies. A continuous ambivalence informs both the prison regime or penal strategies that the colonial government evolved to deal with nationalist activity, and the very perception of the nationalist movement itself, further complicated by the presence of extremist activity.

This ambivalence is seen not only in the wide range of penal strategies the colonial state was forced to evolve, but also in the moments at which it sought to apply these. Regulations meant for crime in the metropolis, detention laws, mass incarceration, deportation-transportation, segregation and isolation, strategies of reclamation via reformation and correction (to 'camouflage the coercive content of colonial prison policy'), establishment of 'shadow prisons' like camps, jail homes, domicile, and the creation of a classification of nationalist prisoners—seditionists, revolutionary terrorists, etc.,—coincided with changing intensities in nationalist activity. For instance, if detention without trial was employed to control militant nationalism in early 20th century, mass incarceration was often employed to contain liberal protests like non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements in the late 1920s and 30s. Resumption of war

conditions and the Quit India movement in the 1940s brought forth a revival of detention, transportation and deportation strategies, used earlier either during mutinies or militant nationalist activities. Throughout the application of these strategies, the colonial government was focused on segregating nationalists from ordinary criminals, for fear of the 'disease' spreading, while not wanting to grant nationalists the status of political prisoners.

The author offers an insightful reading of this ambivalence, proposing that the colonial government resorted to two interesting resolutions to avoid the pitfall of offering 'political' status: (a) the evolution of new terminology for such prisoners—'security prisoners' instead of 'political' prisoners, and (b) the creation of a classification scheme for prisoners hinging on class-based separation so as to circumvent the question of 'political' prisoners entirely.

When the Congress came to power in the 1940s the independent nation-state had to live up to its promise of freeing political prisoners—its own people. Premised on notions of constitutionality and legality, notions which ironically helped define 'political opponents', the new state in a sense continues the project of the colonial state, this time against communists and Naxalites. Detention without trial was perhaps the single most important instrument it deployed in the first 25 years of its rule. The war conditions of the 1960s intensified the use of detention laws against these political opponents right until Emergency, which ended in 1977.

Taking off from a post-structuralist framework, this book offers a fascinating account of the state-prison-public dynamic, arguing that the post-colonial state continued, at least in part, the penal strategies/regime evolved by the colonial state.

While we have a compelling account of the modern prison, a couple of observations come up with regard to the 'prison-public sphere dynamic'. If the prison was integral to the 'popular' struggle against colonialism—because the 'popularity' of liberal nationalism needed to be contained and because the nationalists utilised the very place of containment (prison) in its politics—the same perhaps cannot be said of the prison and public sphere in post-coloniality. Independent India was a negation of colonialism. The Left, radical Left (Naxalites) and ethnic-national mobilisations in post-independence India have identifiable popular bases, which do not enjoy the kind of 'popular appeal' that liberal nationalist activity perhaps did. Can it be said that the prison occupies a certain centrality to the type of politics represented by these mobilisations, as it perhaps did during nationalist times? Or for that matter, is the prison central to any form of liberal public politics in post-1970s India? Colonialism can only be a partial reference point for a history of the post-colonial prison. Where the texture of popular politics has changed, the texture of prison regime would have changed; and where the prison may not be integral to such politics, a different frame of reference—an identification of different historical factors available at that time—could prove crucial in an analysis of the prison. This story of the 'modern Indian prison', clubbing colonial with post-colonial conditions, has offered a very perceptive picture of the state-prison-public dynamic in

coloniality, but may have blurred the place of the prison in the post-colonial public sphere. Methodologically speaking, if the post-colonial public sphere is not foregrounded in such a clubbing of the colonial with the post-colonial, then the picture that emerges is of the transfer of power from one elite to another, and thus of continuity in state policy.

Does the 'reverse of the gaze' hold in post-coloniality? Prison was a negotiating point for nationalist prisoners against the background of a popular liberal nationalist movement. The absence of this 'background' for the Left, Radical Left or ethnic-nationalist movements may prevent a reversal of the gaze: prison is not a public point of negotiation, but a private outpost in the post-colonial public sphere.

Of immense interest to those interested in Human Rights, sociology, political science and history, the book, by honing in on very interesting sources like prison memoirs letters and interviews, is an innovative and rigorous reading of the modern Indian prison.

Bangalore G.N. PRASHANTH

S. IRUDAYA RAJAN, U.S. MISHRA and P. SANKARA SARMA, *India's elderly: Burden or challenge?* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 356 pp. Tables, figures, references, index. Rs. 475 (hardback).

In India, the demographic transition leading to rapid growth in the elderly population coupled with an eroding traditional family system in the wake of rapid modernisation and urbanisation is now a cause for concern. It calls upon academicians, researchers, policy makers and administrators to design appropriate programmes and policies to cater to the needs of older persons. The book under review makes a plea for such an understanding.

The authors use data from the Indian censuses (1961–91), the National Sample Survey, and the Ageing Survey to project demographic trends for the states and union territories of India up to the year 2021. They provide insights about the existing policies and programmes for the elderly in the country, and comprehensively address economic, social, cultural and psychological issues facing a society that is fast ageing. The chapters of the book are well planned, allocated to demography, policies and programmes, living conditions, perceptions, life histories, conceptual issues and recommendations respectively. The demographic assessment indicates that the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Punjab are likely to experience a rapid increase in their elderly population in the coming decades. While no state in India is expected to have more than 10 per cent elderly by 2000, 17 states are projected to cross this level by 2001. Significantly, the growth rate of elderly persons by 2021 will be one and half times higher than the growth rate of the general population. Another interesting feature of the 1991 census is that the proportion of females is slightly higher than the males among the elderly, and this pattern is expected to continue in the near future. The predominance of females in the extreme old age groups needs to be brought

to the attention of planners and policy makers in the country, particularly so when women are considered to be disadvantaged from a young age.

The social and economic characteristics discussed by the authors in terms of literacy, marital status, economic situations and living arrangements are useful for adopting remedial measures, which would in the long run lead to older persons being considered as a resource in society. The elaborate account of the social security schemes in the country makes interesting and informative reading. It raises the question of the role of the state in ensuring a minimum standard of material welfare to its citizens. In this context, it would have been useful if the authors had incorporated components of the National Policy for Older Persons announced in January 1999 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Employment. The Policy has been in the making for many years, and addresses many issues of welfare and development with a focus on empowering older persons to lead a life of dignity and respect.

The presentation of the findings of the National Sample Survey Organisation is extensive, but since some of these have already been highlighted in earlier writings, it loses some of its importance. The analysis from the aging survey carried out by the authors with the collaboration of various leading research institutes of India is illuminating. The selected life histories presenting the different dimensions of the lives of elderly persons are interesting, raising important issues for the place of old age homes in the country, given the dwindling family support systems and social constraints.

Building and managing economic resources is a vital issue in the lives of older people. The question posed by the authors of the 'burden of the elderly' is critically important in this context. It leads to the significance of studying aging issues from a political economy perspective. Perceptions of the elderly have a special place in understanding aging issues. The section on this aspect makes an important contribution to our understanding of the significance of living arrangements and family life. The authors attempt to raise the debate about retirement age and understanding the role of the elderly in terms of age dependency ratios.

The detailed recommendations for policy actions, a strong component of the book and its concluding chapter, focus on the security and support in old age with adoption of life long preparatory measures. These are particularly noteworthy now, when the government's concern for empowering the elderly to live a life of dignity is being given concrete shape.

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KIRAN PURI

RAMA V. BARU, *Private health care in India: Social characteristics and trends*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. 184 pp. Tables, bibliography, index. Rs. 295 (hardback).

This book is a pioneering work in examining the social bases of privatisation of health care in India. Based on an empirical study of private hospitals in the city

of Hyderabad, and on state and national level data from different sources, the author reflects on the links between the public and private medical sectors in the country since Independence. She outlines the growth and diversification of private enterprises with reference to historical, socio-economic and political factors. There are five well-written chapters. These provide an overview of privatisation of medical care; examine the mixed economy in medical care; describe the structure and utilisation of private enterprises as well as the social roots of private medical care through an illustration of Hyderabad; and, finally, describe the factors influencing the growth of the private sector.

Contrasting and comparing the evolution of medical services in the Indian situation with other countries, primarily UK and the US, enhances the value of the book. A concern about the push given to privatisation of medical care by the state under structural adjustment policies runs through the book. Its implications for health service planning in the future are lucidly presented, and would be of interest to readers from different disciplines.

Maitreyi College MALA KAPUR SHANKARDASS
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BHARGAVI V. DAVAR, *Mental health of Indian women: A feminist agenda*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 281 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, index. Rs. 375 (hardback).

AND

AMITA DHANDA, *Legal order and mental disorder*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000. 354 pp. Tables, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. Rs. 450 (hardback).

Both these works begin from the position that mental health, especially women's mental health, has not been on the agenda of legal and medical discourses in India. This relative neglect is primarily attributed to the patriarchal and colonial underpinnings of major societal discourses and institutions. While Bhargavi Davar reviews and interprets available data in mental health disciplines from a gender sensitive perspective in the domains of theory, research, clinical practice and policy, Amita Dhanda provides a rights-based analysis of the laws relating to persons with mental illness in the Indian context.

In addition to their common point of departure, there are other similarities between the two works. Methodologically, both draw upon an interdisciplinary discourse of psychiatry, law, philosophy, psychology and feminism. In the disaggregation of the triad of insanity-criminality-morality, the authors highlight the prevalence of gender bias in the psychiatric and legal discourses. While Davar traces the theme in the context of psychiatric epidemiology, nosology and therapy, Dhanda pursues the issue through an analysis of the insanity plea, especially in the context of the marriage and divorce laws. How role deviations from normatively ascribed gender-based stereotypes of femininity can result in both

psychiatric incarceration and legal victimisation is demonstrated through dramatic case illustrations. For instance, the overlap between clinical categories and social stereotypes is discussed by Davar in connection with hysteria. In fact, the existence of gender bias in official discourses finds empirical validity in the data on service delivery. Gender politics differentially affects access to healthcare and legal succour. For instance, surveys have pointed out that mental hospitals in India primarily cater to men, and there is a sex-based discrimination in the availability of beds. On the other hand, the majority of long-stay hospital inmates (many of whom are cured) are women, because hospital policies for the release of female patients make the surety of a relative or friend mandatory. Since many of these women have been abandoned by their families, they are forced to languish in confinement long after recovery.

Both works offer a trenchant critique of the state's approach to mental health. For instance, they point to a number of weaknesses of the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), such as its inadequate resource logic, overmedicalised interpretation of mental disorder (leading to the neglect of common mental disorders such as the psychoneuroses), and the absence of any engagement with mental illness among vulnerable groups, such as women and offenders. Similarly, even though mental retardation has been separated from mental illness in the Mental Health Act of 1987, there is no alternate legal regime to protect persons suffering from mental retardation.

In order to enhance the negotiating power of persons with mental illness and to work towards the creation of a more humane, gender-sensitive psychiatric practice and legal system, both authors advocate the adoption of a range of concrete strategies. In the realm of mental health practice, Davar makes a fervent plea for privileging the language of distress over the language of illness. She also suggests the consideration of victimisation as a diagnosable condition, and the introduction of the concept of androgyny in the clinic to counter gender bias. Dhanda, on the other hand, advocates making law an instrument of destigmatisation and empowerment. Firstly, she calls for a rigorous operationalisation of the often taken-for-granted concept of 'unsoundness of mind' to negotiate the tension between medical and legal definitions of insanity. Contesting the ascendancy of the medical regime in determining mental incapacity in the courtroom, she feels that a legal, not a medical, standard of incapacity to stand trial be determined. Despite the importance attached to the psychiatric examination in the determination of insanity by adjudicators, it has not been an institutionalised practice in most cases in which the insanity plea has been invoked. Dhanda also feels that there should be legal provisions for the treatment of insane undertrials, since the practice of confining them in jails is a blatant infringement of their constitutional right to life and liberty. Furthermore, the provision of postponement of trial of such persons should be brought under judicial review, and a time limit to such postponement be set, given the fact that an insane undertrial can be indefinitely incarcerated in jail for the security of society. Right now the law allows nullity of marriage on the factual existence of mental illness in one of the spouses. According to the author, curability of the disorder and the degree of

dysfunction should also be taken into account, instead of the mere presence of mental illness. Divorce should not be obtainable for curable mental illnesses. Like the maintenance provision, surety of treatment should be a precondition for divorce. Marital rights of persons with mental illness need to be formulated from a gender sensitive perspective, since the majority of respondents in cases where insanity is put forward as a ground for divorce are women.

In the face of the state's diminishing investment in the social sector, both authors stress the need for involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in spearheading legislative reform and mental health practice. For instance, Dhanda feels that such organisations can play a useful role in the management of the property of mentally ill persons. According to Davar, the NGO sector can play a major role in enhancing the bargaining power of mentally disturbed women in the clinic. Since the issue of women's mental and emotional health has not been a central concern of the women's movement in India so far, she envisages a more proactive role for feminists in this regard.

Both these works are pioneering in their discursive analysis of insanity in contemporary India. They are based on sound scholarship and a deep ideological commitment to ameliorating the welfare of persons with mental illness, especially women. They also lay out a tentative framework for multi-sectoral reform which, if implemented, would promote the integrated living of persons suffering from mental distress. Regrettably, we do not hear the voice of these sufferers: an absence which both Davar and Dhanda attribute to gaps in the available literature on mental distress among women in the Indian context Both authors reiterate the need for generating local narratives of distress using medical-anthropological methods. Consequently, without that subjective insight into the phenomenology of psychopathology, this discursive analysis remains an unfinished project.

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RENU ADDLAKHA

SANGEETA R. GUPTA, ed., *Emerging voices: South Asian American women redefine self, family and community*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 259 pp. Notes, references, index. Rs. 395 (hardback). Rs. 225 (paperback).

AND

CARLA RISSEEUW and KAMALA GANESH, eds ,*Negotiation and social space: A gendered analysis of changing kin and security networks in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. 355 pp. Tables, maps, notes, references, index. Rs. 450 (hardback).

Both volumes under review have emerged out of conferences on changing gender relations within kin, family and community networks in a comparative context. Carla Risseeuw and Kamala Ganesh focus on South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, while Sangeeta Gupta examines the South Asian diaspora in the

United States. The last two decades of scholarship in the social sciences and humanities have been remarkable for the way in which gender has been foregrounded in various fields of research. For instance, gender is no longer treated as merely an added variable in anthropological work, but as a central analytic construct. Both volumes have essays that reflect this centrality through interdisciplinary work and the use of feminist research methodology. The essays in Gupta's book are more experiential in character, while the Risseeuw and Ganesh volume takes a more policy-oriented, development approach on gender. The focus in *Emerging voices* is on the family and the community intersecting with women's identity questions. In *Negotiation and social space*, the family is seen as a unit of production and consumption, examined against the background of social security and changing kin and gender roles.

The Indian diaspora in the United States has now assumed a unique character, with second-generation Indian Americans constantly having to cope with bicultural identities. Quite a few books have emerged in the last few years representing the articulations and expressions of the second generation that is trying to come to terms with its diasporic identity. *A Part, Yet Apart*, and *Contours of our Heat* are some such recent volumes that come to mind. Sangeeta Gupta's *Emerging voices* is also on the lines of this new diasporic literature, although the essays are of uneven quality. The strength of the book lies in the openness of the contributors and the kind of self-reflexivity that is uncommon in academic work.

The book offers the voices of South Asian American women of the first, the so-called 1.5 (those born in India, but raised in the US), and the second generations. There are case studies as well as experiential accounts of redefining self, family and community in the diasporic context. Travelling cultures and hybrid identities today have greater academic interest than the older anthropological notion of understanding fixed and unchanging cultural patterns. Both the researchers and the researched in this volume are exploring questions of identity and probing the meanings of being simultaneously South Asian and American. Lubna Chaudhry's article, with extended excerpts from her personal journal, is an avid account of her hybridity and the merging within her self of the real and the imaginary—of California and Lahore.

What makes South Asian women's experiences different from men? How has gender affected their lives in the United States? These are some of the questions that recur in these essays. Karen Leonard's essay on the subject of marriage and dating in the South Asian diaspora is based on a content analysis of the ethnic press in Southern California. This paper and the one by Sangeeta Gupta on dating and marriage reveal that the institution of arranged marriage in the Indian American community is being altered creatively to include introduction of prospective partners and dating. Intergenerational conflict is often because of differing expectations regarding marriage and divorce among first generation immigrants and their American children. The last paper by Ananya Bhattacharjee (re-published from a 1992 *Public Culture* article) focuses on the Indian immigrant community's nostalgia for the Hindu, upper-caste traditional India and its deliberate glossing over of contentious issues like domestic

violence in the immigrant families. While *Emerging voices* has some valuable contributions to the literature on the Indian immigrant community, one would have liked the editor to acknowledge the many ideas that she has freely borrowed for her introduction from other books on women in the Indian diaspora.

Carla Risseeuw and Kamala Ganesh's agenda in *Negotiation and social space* combines concerns at both the macro and micro levels. Their volume provides a comparative analysis of changes in the institutions of family, kinship and marriage in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Global restructuring has brought about new economic opportunities and opened up new social spaces for women. The editors adopt an interdisciplinary approach to understand changes in gender relations, consciously choosing essays that build bridges between economics and anthropology. The family is not constructed as an unchanging institution, but as a social arena where constant renegotiation and restructuring of roles take place.

The book opens with two overviews by Els Baerends on sub-Saharan Africa and Leela Dube on South Asia. Like in Gupta's volume, the family is seen here as not only offering individuals a security net, but also containing within it violence and exploitation. Pre-colonial kinship relations in sub-Saharan Africa were distinctive for the complementary roles played by men and women, and for the considerable autonomy enjoyed by women as food-producers. Capitalist economy and colonial intervention changed the gender balance, making women primarily responsible for the management of the household, while the men became active in the public sphere. Leela Dube's work shows that there is an unmistakable stamp of patrilineal kinship ideology in legislation even in matrilineal and bilateral communities in Sri Lanka and India. Globalisation and fundamentalism, rather than ushering in liberation as is claimed, reproduce traditional patriarchal ideology in family and kinship systems.

Wide-ranging issues such as education, legal reform, women's property rights, and negotiations between public and domestic spheres are discussed in the thirteen essays in the volume. Karuna Chanana discusses gender ideology and education among first and second-generation Punjabi women in the context of the Partition. The trauma of Partition may have to some extent empowered women in the public sphere, but it did not change traditional gender ideology.

Both the collections underline the fact that gender cannot be understood in a monolithic sense, but must be analysed and interpreted within the context of broader structural and cultural elements of society. While *Emerging voices* would be more useful in the context of cultural studies in the diaspora, *Negotiation and social space* could be a valuable addition to development literature.

University of Hyderabad APARNA RAYAPROL

MRINALINI SINHA, ed., *Selections from Katherine Mayo's Mother India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998. 298 pp. Notes, appendices. Rs. 410 (hardback).

Mrinalini Sinha's edited selections from *Mother India* by Katherine Mayo (1867–1940) carries an introduction of sixty pages. Parts I and II from Mayo's

original are reproduced in their entirety. The remaining parts are edited, with special attention to Mayo's discussions of the conditions of women and of the 'untouchables' in India. The volume ends with some selected responses to Mayo's writings written between 1927 and 1929.

Sinha notes that, *Mother India* was published in UK and the US in the summer of 1927 and was celebrated by imperialists and reviled by nationalists. This sensational book led to unprecedented debate and controversy. It blamed the excessive sexuality of Indian males for the ills of Indian society.

The introduction is crucial because it not only gives us necessary details of Mayo's life, but tells us why even today this book and the different responses to it are important for rewriting a gendered social history of India in a nuanced way. The introduction points out that Mayo's writings generated the imperialist vs. nationalist controversy, which reverberates even today. According to Sinha, the massive controversy over *Mother India* laid the foundations of an alliance between modern Indian nationalism and feminism. Since its publication, *Mother India* has spawned a mini industry of books and pamphlets written in response to it. Though this book was written on the basis of only a 3–4 months' tour of India during 1925–26, it attracted the attention of stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and Periyar. It contained a strong indictment of the demands for Indian self-rule and an argument in favour of continued British Rule over India

Mayo's work, though crudely propagandist, talked about the deplorable treatment of women, untouchables, animals and the overall unsanitary conditions of Indian life. The hypocrisy and hollowness of Indian education as a whole was underlined in it. The roots of all of India's problems were seen in the sexual organisation of Hindu society. The book gave a sensational picture of rampant sexuality and its consequences in India. The tabooed details of masturbation, rape, homosexuality, prostitution, venereal disease, early sexual intercourse, and premature maternity were discussed, and Hindu religion and culture were held responsible for them. India's backwardness was highlighted as a religious-cultural product to counter the Indian nationalists' claims of cultural superiority. Thus, colonial rule was exempted from responsibility for India's backwardness.

The introduction is divided into three sections and looks at the controversy around *Mother India* in the multiple contexts of US, British and Indian politics. Section one traces the domestic and imperial political background and makes us aware that through this book, Mayo, who was herself backed by conservative feminists in the US, became a crusader for the cause of Indian women. Her work eventually became a major source of information on India in the US, and Sinha tells us that as late as the 1970s, Peace Corps volunteers were being recommended this book. According to Sinha, Mayo's intention was to attack Hindus, and her efforts to reveal the evils of child marriage were more political than genuine. Sinha unhesitantly tells us that Mayo's contributions to women and feminism have been an accidental and contingent outcome of a campaign to advance the colonial agenda.

Section two of the introduction locates *Mother India* within the history of the imperialist-nationalist debate on the woman question in colonial India. As Sinha has pointed out, *Mother India* was an important event of the 1920s, when British imperial policy towards India recognised the need for institutions of self-governance for India, and there was a simultaneous rise in Indian nationalism, with Mahatma Gandhi giving it a turn towards social reform instead of focusing only on political rights. By challenging Mayo, Indian nationalism could claim to be the only truly modernising force.

The third section of the introduction examines the *Mother India* controversy for understanding the woman question and its implications for Indian nationalism and Indian feminism in late colonial India. Sinha tells us that the controversy around *Mother India* contributed to the consolidation of links between elite Indian nationalism and middle class Indian feminism, resulting in the polarisation of the imperialist and nationalist camps. This further resulted in the marginalisation of the nuanced arguments made by the Self Respect Movement, which had an anti-caste perspective, and other socially radical critiques of gender, caste and class hierarchies in India.

Sinha shows how Mahatma Gandhi's faith in Varnashramadharma gave an idealised interpretation of the caste system, which affected the anti-caste movement's response (particularly that of Periyar's Self Respect Movement, which was relatively sympathetic to the text of *Mother India*). Sinha tells us that though the leadership of this movement defended Mayo's text publicly, this was only to challenge the implicit gender, caste, and class hierarchies in the modernising agenda of mainstream Indian nationalism. Moreover, Sarojini Naidu was sent as a woman representative from India to counter Mayo's propaganda in the US. This created legitimacy for the Indian nationalist movement and discredited British imperialism, which treated Indian women as always and already victimised. Sinha notes: 'The *Mother India* controversy thus served to provide greater recognition both in India and abroad for the role of middle class Indian women and of the organised women's movement in the debate on the woman question in India' (p. 53).

This reproduction of Mayo would have been much more fruitful if more extensive thematic reproductions of different responses to Mayo had been placed alongside the original text. One especially misses the responses of Tilak and Ayyar, both of whom had engaged in a serious debate with Mayo. As a Women's Studies teacher and researcher, one wonders what kinds of appropriations (especially those which are not so progressive) that such a text may allow, in these times of deepening relationship between market fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism. For the growing Hindu Right and their women's wing, Mayo may provide a justification for beating all of Western Feminism. Of course, Sinha does underline the fact that Mayo was not an emancipatory feminist by any definition, and that her politics were deeply enmeshed with imperialist politics.

University of Pune VIDYUT BHAGWAT

MADHU KISHWAR, *Off the beaten track: Rethinking gender justice for Indian women*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. 290 pp. Notes, references. Rs. 495 (hardback).

The essays collected here first appeared in the journal *Manushi* from 1980 to 1997. This period covers the second wave of the organised women's movement in India—from the earliest agitations against dowry to the collective concern over community and identity. The essays in the volume are arranged according to different phases of Kishwar's engagement with the feminist movement—from being an initiator of many movement campaigns and an integral part of it, to going against the use of titles like feminist.

There are two major themes around which the articles are selected—women and their rights in the natal family and in the marital situation, and women in the public sphere. The first theme begins with three articles on dowry, followed by articles dealing with the campaigns for women's rights as wives and widows. The articles on dowry trace the movement from its initial opposition to dowry to accepting it as a form of inheritance and then laying greater stress on the inadequacy of dowry as inheritance.

The articles on rights of wives and widows focus on the campaigns for widow's land rights, common matrimonial property rights, and against sati. They caution us against strengthening the position of wives at the cost of the position of mothers and daughters in the family. Kishwar suggests that women are most exploited in their natal homes.

There is another set of articles which talks about the marital relationship—'love and marriage', restraint as a strategy in marriage, and the interpretation of Sita as a marital ideal for women, not merely as the ideal self-sacrificing woman but as the strong woman who is able to reject Ram for being a bad husband.

The other major theme in the book is women in the political and public sphere. Beginning with the use of violence in Indian electoral politics (which discourages independent women from participating), it moves on to the question of reservation of seats for women (which privileges women from political families) and the marginalisation of their role in politics.

Kishwar writes about the growth of illiberal politics and their harmful effects on women, citing the example of one of her own feminist campaigns against 'westernised' beauty contests, which legitimised the emergence of a more restrictive culture in Delhi colleges. She then talks of women in their places of work and the prevalence of sexual harassment, sharing her experiences of a campaign on this issue in Delhi University, and encourages women to be 'outspoken Durgas' to counter this hidden violence.

The final two articles deal with identities—the need to recognise multi-layered personal identities and deny unidimensional stereotyped ones. She rejects her own identification as feminist in order to be able to speak to more people without a label. She defines her world view as equality and dignity for all without authoritarian and non-consensual politics. Her advice for women-focussed

campaigns would be—more power to women in the natal home and bolder behaviour in public.

Mumbai AMRITA SHODHAN

HIRA SINGH, *Colonial hegemony and popular resistance: Princes, peasants and paramount power*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. 274 pp. Map, notes, references, appendices, bibliography, glossary, index. Rs. 375 (hardback).

E.J. Hobsbawm is said to have once remarked that it may well be a difficult matter for a zoologist to define a horse, but this does not mean there is any real difficulty about recognising one (Singh: 216). Historians seem to have gotten into a similar sort of tangle when it comes to the matter of what is feudalism and what is not. Those of us who have lived in Rajasthan—as both the reviewer and the author of this book have—know very well what this feudalism is subjectively about. To demonstrate its existence with proper scriptural proof is, however, quite another matter. All the same, Hira Singh takes the bull by the horns, cutting his way through colonial and post-colonial illusions, and convincingly argues in favor of the utility of the term in describing the system of production and polity obtaining in Rajasthan in the first quarter of the century just concluded.

Hira Singh's book seeks to look into the course of the struggle between the agencies of change and structures that resist transformation He makes the case for a deconstruction of the conventional view that it was colonial capitalism that brought about the transformation and the forces of feudalism that resisted it. Hira Singh would have us believe that this was not quite the whole picture, and that the contradictions opening up this society lay as much in the antagonisms within as in the forces without.

The geographical focus of the book is largely on western Rajasthan, and the time frame covered extends from a little after the turn of the (20th) century almost up to the coming of independence. By concentrating on western Rajasthan the author has contributed consciously to highlighting the conditions of agrarian social economy in so-called 'Indian' India, providing a balance to views focusing excessively on developments in the British administered territories. Leaving aside the Introduction and the Conclusion, the book comprises five chapters, which look from different angles at the relationship between the colonial state, the body of peasant producers, and the two strata that comprise the native ruling elite, namely the durbar or the court, and its feudatories, the land owning class of thikanedars. Of these five chapters, the first two are largely descriptive. The author deals first with the native ruling class, providing a highly nuanced account that describes their various privileges, obligations, functions and limitations with a great deal of empathy, insight and understanding. The subsequent chapter provides a rather summary description of the situation of the primary producers. The wide variety of peasant producers are lumped together in

an omnibus category of kisans, and presented to us along the same lines as their thikanedar counterparts.

The remaining three chapters provide the core of the book. The first two of these are somewhat predictably entitled 'Action from Below' and 'Reaction from Above'. In the third the author relates these two movements to the compulsions of colonial realpolitik. The analytical ground covered by Hira Singh in these chapters is both substantial and readably presented. Some of the aspects covered are: the changing alliance between the colonial power and the durbar and its effect on the standing of the thikanedar class; the politics between the thikanedars and the durbar, the distancing between the local elites and the peasantry; cultural disintegration of the indigene ruling classes; cultural affirmation of the peasantry as it acquired self-consciousness as a political force; the emergence of rich peasant leadership; and the containment of radicalism through non-violence.

As in the earlier chapters, Hira Singh's strengths lie in his account of the travails of the native ruling strata, the thikanedars at the local level and the durbar in Jodhpur. In contrast to his firm grasp of the complexity and nuanced nature of power relations within the native ruling networks, the author more or less homogenises the profoundly segmented social structure of the labouring populace. Much is made of the importance of caste, but in practice 'caste' is brought in invariably as a stand-alone 'factor' just about anywhere in each chapter. Responding to Barrington Moore's and Louis Dumont's approach to the matter, he states that they both 'find the main source of India's uniqueness in the caste system... Rather than looking at caste historically as an institution of Indian society—albeit an important one—they tend to reduce Indian society and history to caste...' (p. 220). What does Hira Singh give us instead? An equally pre-conceived view of history as class struggle. While sharing Hira Singh's discomfort with idealist explanations, I do believe that he has needlessly shackled himself to a theoretical framework and a body of debates that have now largely been superseded.

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PURNENDU S. KAVOORI

PAUL HOCKINGS, ed., *Blue mountains revisited. Cultural studies on the Nilgiri Hills*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997 xii + 345 pp. Figures, plates, notes, references, index. Rs. 575 (hardback).

Paul Hockings' edited book has two main purposes: to deconstruct a common perception that the Nilgiri Hills are somehow stuck in a 'quintessentially British' time-warp, and to illustrate (as a response to this perception) that the hill inhabitants in fact live in a complex, interactive society rather than isolated tribal niches. It is these objectives and the geography of the Nilgiris which bind together an otherwise diverse and disjointed collection of articles. Thus, while the articles in this book are no doubt rich in anthropological material and, as the editor argues, original to a great extent, the book could have been organised

in a far better manner. This review delineates one way how this could have been done.

The last article by Marie-Claude Mahias, entitled 'The construction of the Nilgiris as a tribal sanctuary', should have stood first as it examines how the Nilgiris came to be constructed in the popular imagination as a stagnant, never-changing region. Mahias rearticulates well-known debates about caste, race and tribe, and the randomness associated with these generic terms. She also delineates how the administrative category 'tribe' eventually became a label given to most communities in the Nilgiris. The importance of the article is, however, not in terms of its analytical richness but in terms of the background it provides for the rest of the book.

Anthony Walker's piece, 'The Western romance with the Toda', complements Mahias' article well. Walker reconstructs what he believes to have been the reasons for the West's fascination with the Toda. The Toda, numerically speaking, have never been the most populous community in the Nilgiris, yet much of the literature on the Nilgiris pertains to them. The reason—the Toda depict the tribal stereotype well, and thus deserve to be protected. No wonder the Toda, in their traditional habitations, have become tourist attractions today.

If these articles deal with how the British attempted to construct its own Nilgiris, most of the other articles are aimed at causing anarchy—in the sense that they attempt to capture the interlinkages amongst different hill communities and even between those of the hills and plains, or changes in cultural practices over time. The first article by Nurit Bird-David, 'The Nilgiri tribal system: A view from below,' illustrates how constructions of the Nilgiris are largely based on the Nilgiri Plateau, not on the Nilgiri-Wynaad Plateau which lies at a lower elevation. The author argues that the Wynaad region does not exhibit the same extent of spatial and cultural divide as the Nilgiri plateau, where the Toda, Kota, Kurumba and Badaga communities interact only with regard to specific functional responsibilities. In Wynaad, tribal communities have similar political structures and community organisations, and are more interspersed amongst each other.

A number of the other articles also deal with the theme of inter-community interaction/influence, but with regard to more specific issues. Allen Zagarell writes about the megalithic graves of the Nilgiri Hills and how their spatial layout was affected by direct and significant contact with neighbours from areas bordering the hills. Christiane Pilot-Raichoor's piece on the Badaga language examines the influence of not only Kannada, but more importantly Toda and Kota. M.B. Emeneau's article on linguistics and botany, though not very pleasant reading, talks about Tamil and Malayalam influences on the Toda language and botanical diversity in different parts of the hills. Hockings' 'Badaga epic poetry' tries to identify characteristics of the Indian epic in Badaga epics while of course highlighting the uniqueness of the latter. Heidemann's article on immigrant labourers and local networks illustrates how cross-cultural interaction between plantation workers and locals varies

according to the characteristics of different regional migrants. In fact all these articles, while stressing cross-cultural influences, also point to the 'cultural uniqueness' of the local.

Change in traditions is the other underlying theme of the book. Richard Kent Wolf's article on the rain ceremony of the Kota illustrates how the Kota have reconfigured this tradition in the absence of qualified masters of ceremony. Thus, while the importance of community unity remains, the ceremony is carried out in a different way than in the past. Noble's article on Toda huts and houses is similar in the sense that it highlights how some Toda have sacrificed the traditional spatial organisation of the hut interior for more 'modern' type houses similar to the Badaga. Demmer's article on the Jenu Kurumba is the odd one out as it focuses on how the moral order of kinship shapes gathering camps within this community alone.

While the book makes for compelling reading, a number of doubts exist in this reader's mind, mostly to do with the editorial introduction and the editor's intent. On the one hand, Hockings seems to be suggesting that the Nilgiris are not quintessentially British. Yet, on the other hand, he says while referring to the hill communities that 'each of these groups may well have been discrete societies with their own characteristic and very distinctive culture until mid-century'. This implies that while the Nilgiris might not be isolated, aloof communities now, they were when the British were here. If that is what is being said, it implies that inter-community interaction and cultural exchange only came in the post-colonial period. Surely this cannot be the case, and in fact, ends up back with the notion that tribals were indeed 'unique' as the British constructed them to be.

Interestingly, however, there is no engagement with the colonial period at all to see what Hockings actually meant and whether or not the reviewer's contention at the outset regarding his intent was correct. What is sure is that the British presence in the hills had an impact. Researchers working on agrarian history have argued that despite the protection of the Toda community, much land alienation took place. Did this force inter-community interaction or did inter-community interaction predate this period? Most likely the latter. Answers by the editor to these questions would have helped untangle his intent more clearly. This reader is, therefore, left with the feeling that the book does not go far enough in disentangling the quintessentially British character of the hills.

Finally, it is important to note, as Wolf does in his piece, that tribal communities themselves use the labels given to them. This is no more clear today than in demands being made for separately delineated tribal areas. In that sense, the quintessentially constructed hill community has indeed acquired an identity of its own, which separates itself not only from non-tribal communities, but often from other tribal groups. That is an irony in itself and one we need to understand better.

Madras School of Economics AJIT MENON

BRADLEY R. HERTEL and CYNTHIA ANN HUMES, eds., *Living Banaras: Hindu religion in cultural context*. Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1998. 320 pp. Figures, plates, maps, notes, references, appendices, index. Rs. 600 (hardback).

The book under review is a collection of nine fieldwork based articles revolving around the broad theme of current cultural practices and living religious traditions of Banaras City—the ultimate Hindu pilgrimage centre. The city of lights, of salvation, of imposing temples, ghats, and the delectable *Banarasi paan*. The book covers ethnographic views, observations and empirical studies from different perspectives of many religious/cultural practices in Banaras such as Ramlila celebrations, devotion to Hanuman, male and female asceticism, Dandi sadhus, and so on.

The first three articles of the book are about the Ramlila, an annual reenactment of Ram's epic journey as recorded in Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*. Ramlila of Ramnagar (across the Ganges River) is renowned, and the only one of its kind which is staged in different locations spread over approximately fifteen square miles. Richard Schechner provides an excellent description of Ramnagar's Ramlila, delving into its mythological and contemporary significance. It is, however debatable whether the Ramlila at Ramnagar represents the political end of the King of Banaras.

In another article, Linda Hess explains that many frames of the *Ramcharitmanas* and the Ramlila are inextricably intertwined. Just as there is no clear separation of the narrators from the story of *Ramcharitmanas*, so there is no clear delineation between the world and the performance or between the audience and the actors. Thomas Parkhill's study is based, in part, on fieldwork carried out during the Ramlila season of 1984. It has been appropriately observed that the Ramlila is changing from potent ritual into diluted theatre. Young generations are introducing innovations (such as the use of lighting, microphones and modern music, etc.) which elderly and tradition-minded people find repugnant.

Joseph S. Alter's paper is about wrestling (*pahalwani*). He provides an interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the Banarasi wrestler's body, showing how the body becomes a medium for moral self-expression through association with the iconographic physique of Hanuman, the patron deity of all wrestlers (p. 127), who embodies the three basic traits of *shakti* (divine energy), *bhakti* (devotion) and *brahmacharya* (celibacy). For a wrestler's physical strength, devotion and self-control is vital and, therefore, they worship Hanuman.

Mary Searle-Chatterjee has chosen a very interesting topic: Hindu and Muslim collective memories of Ghazi Miyan (an 11th century Muslim warrior-saint, and Aurangzeb (last of the great Mughal emperors). Her interpretation of myth and history demonstrates many of the mythical portrayals of Ghazi Miyan and Aurangzeb by both Hindu and Muslim communities leading to conflicting conclusions as to what is historical fact. With an analysis of competing narratives based on oral traditions and folk legends on the one hand, and history

text books on the other, she attempts to show that perception of the past may provide a basis for religious division or mobilisation.

Varanasi is the most important centre of Dandi monasticism in India. Dona W. Sawyer has studied the Monastic structure of Banarasi Dandi Sadhus. For this, she surveyed 25 Dandi maths. While studying the ideal and real social structure of Dandi monasteries and the Dandi ideal of the living Master, she finds substantial discrepancy between the ideal vision and actual manifestations of the Dandi monastic structure.

Cynthia Ann Humes, in her paper on 'Goddess of the Vindhyas in Banaras', traces the popularisation and spread of this (Vindhyavasini) regional Hindu cult and the relationship between the Goddess Vindhyavasini and her Banarasi devotees by drawing on each temple's mythological description and historical background. The description of Vindhyavasini at Inglishiya Line road may not be recognised by the vast majority of devout Hindus living in Varanasi.

Ratnesh K. Pathak and Cynthia Ann Humes' well-written paper describes how infertile couples bathe in the Lolank Kund, during the 'Chhath Mela' in the belief that by doing this they will conceive.

Beth Simon's paper is on 'Language choice, religion and identity in the Banarasi community'. The term *Banarasi Boli* is not a recognised or accepted term, as a matter of fact, there is not such thing as *Banarasi Boli*. What the writer calls *Banarasi Boli* is in fact the variant of Bhojpuri spoken in Varanasi. It may be recalled that other variants of Bhojpuri spoken in places like Chapara and Ballia are not called Chapara *Boli* or Ballia *Boli*. Similarly, there is little justification for calling this variety *Banarasi Boli*. The author has not specified any distinct phonological, grammatical, lexical or stylistic features making it different from Bhojpuri which, in fact, is a dialect of Hindi.

Furthermore, the author has not cited any established authority in support of the label *Banarasi Boli*. In fact, there is not a single reference under the label *Banarasi Boli* as a distinct language variety in any scholarly work. The only work the author refers to is Grierson's linguistic survey of India, published more than a hundred years ago. It is common knowledge that most of Grierson's findings in the LIS are not considered authentic because they are based on information collected through Patwaries and other junior officers. It is curious that the author refers to Muslims as Urdu speakers, although the majority of Muslims living in Varanasi also speak Bhojpuri like the Hindus.

The diverse themes and fields of the authors provide an understanding of some aspects of Hindu religion as practised in Banaras, the most sacred Hindu pilgrimage centre. On the whole, the book touches only a small fragment of life and society in Banaras. Also, excessive coverage is given to relatively unimportant items—for example, in a book of 268 pages, the Ramnagar Ramlila has been discussed for 118 pages.

Banaras Hindu University ARVIND K. JOSHI

FAREED KAZMI, *The politics of India's conventional cinema: Imaging a universe, subverting a multiverse*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 252 pp. Tables, notes, references, index. Rs. 195 (paperback).

Kazmi's book draws links between politics, culture, society and mass media, in his interpretation, conventional cinema is not pure entertainment, but is 'politically and ideologically loaded' (p. 16). Images are not art but 'politics by other means' (p. 14) The first part of the book spends time on outlining terms through which the ideas of a visual politics are discussed.

The heart of the book lies in the analysis of films that are exemplars of the genre—the blockbusters *Sholay*, *Coolie* and *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*. Each film is located in a political landscape that 'shapes' the film. Thus, *Sholay* (1975) coincides with the declaration of 'fascist' Emergency rule (1975); *Coolie* (1983) was released after the reemergence of Indira Gandhi who, having exhausted populist and coercive measures, resorted to 'rule of numbers'. *Coolie*, one of the few films with a Muslim protagonist, feeds into the political anxieties of majority-minority division. Post-Mandal, *Hum Apke Hain Kaun* (HAHK: 1994) was released 'in the immediate aftermath of one of the most divisive and violent periods of post-Independence India' (p. 138). Kazmi honestly confesses that unlike the other films analysed in the book, where the connections between propaganda, politics and cinematic language re-enforce each other, HAHK challenges the premise of his analytical model. HAHK is bereft of all dramatisations of injustice, exploitation, victimisation and suffering; in fact it seem to have no 'problem' to address at all. The film images a 'blissful state from beginning to end' (p. 139). Even the otherwise ubiquitous villain is absent.

Kazmi is not disheartened by the simple absence of conflicts and villains. Instead he reads into the bliss an attempt at muting and silencing the anxieties raised by the Mandal conflicts. The muting is seen by Kazmi as a power relation that simultaneously works to restore a uncentred 'Hindu' community of coherence.

While the main body of the book centres around Kazmi's 'reading' of the films as texts, opening each text towards contemporary political events, HAHK is one film in which Kazmi gives space to audience interpretations, briefly acknowledging the complexities involved in the 'act' of viewing and the participation invoked by directors of conventional cinema.

It is a pity that Kazmi by-passes the enormous literature on active viewers and the politics of experience. Despite the richness of his textual analysis, where the use of colours, camera angles, cinematic characterisations and dramatic tropes are explored, the 'absence' of the audience's voice is a problem that has a politics of its own that we, the readers, cannot ignore.

Delhi School of Economics RADHIKA CHOPRA

RANGANAYAKAMMA, *An introduction to Marx's 'Capital'* (3 volumes). English translation of 1st vol. by K.V. Ramana Reddy, S.V. Rajyalakshmi & B.R. Bapuji. Translation of 2nd & 3rd vols. by B.R. Bapuji. Hyderabad: Sweet Home Publications, 1999. x + 639 pp. Figures, index. Rs. 90.00 each (hardbook).

One of the ironies of these turbulent times, when Marxism has been consigned to the margins as a 'spent' force, is that the 'spectre' refuses to be laid to rest! In fact in the recent past, even the pages of mainstream journals like *The Economist* have been quoting Marx's analyses of the internationalisation of capital as an accurate prediction of today's global capital network.

So a set of volumes that promises to take the lay reader through the 'tortuous' paths of Marx's analysis of capitalist dynamics in *Capital* is undoubtedly welcome. Ranganayakkamma's *Introduction to Marx's Captial* is remarkable in that it is the first indigenous attempt to present the core of Marx's political economy in a popular manner. There are also few people in India today who are better placed to do justice to such a project than Ranganayakkamma, a very well-known and well-regarded figure on the left, especially in Andhra Pradesh.

This project began as a translation of the three volumes of *Capital* into Telugu. Strictly speaking, it is not simply a primer on *Capital*, but is more accurately an introduction to Marxist-Leninist political economy with sections on 'Crises', 'Imperialism' and 'The New Society'. This English version presents in three volumes (of two parts each), the original five volumes in Telugu that came out between 1978 and 1993.

The first volume comprises two parts on 'Commodities and Money' and on the 'Process of Capitalist Production', and basically covers the content of the first volume of *Capital*. The first part of volume II deals with the 'Process of Capitalist Reproduction' and the second part with the 'Process of Circulation'. This covers the second and part of the third volume of *Capital*. The remaining portions of the third volume of *Capital* are dealt with in the first part of the final volume of this work on—'Relations of Capitalist Distribution'. This includes a chapter on Imperialism, which is based more on the writings of Lenin then those of Marx. The concluding part of this volume—'Towards a Classless Society'—presents a picture of what the author imagines a alternative 'New Society' inspired by Marx's critique of Capitalism would be like.

Aimed at less educated labourers and workers, the volumes quite unabashedly avoid 'intellectualism' and skirt most of the debates among Marxist academics. You will not find here any discussion of the transformation problem or the implications of Okishio's theorem on the falling rate of profit. You will find, however, a painstaking reconstruction of the arguments developed through the three volumes of *Capital*, complete with illustrations and examples. The style is particularly suited to collective oral readings. These volumes could fill a major void within left activist circles by providing an accessible introduction to the intricacies of Marxist political economy, which could be used both for self study

and study classes. One wonders, of course, if it was really necessary for the 'introduction' to rival the original in length! For a popular introduction, the size of these volumes is a bit daunting.

The richness of the volumes of Capital lies in the wealth of concrete historical material. Here the introduction misses an opportunity to bring out the relevance of Marx's analyses to contemporary capitalism, in particular to what is popularly termed the 'globalisation' of the Third World. Concrete analysis with real examples from the contemporary business world; illustrations of real conditions of work and workers in factories in India; issues of struggle and dispute; the nature of competitive warfare among companies; and some history of actual mergers and acquisitions would have definitely enhanced the volume's worth as a popular introduction providing rich material for study classes.

The other regret is that writing a popular account seems to have been taken to mean considerable oversimplification of some arguments. There is a tradition of popular Marxist writing that is both easy to read and faithful to complex formulations as in the work of George Thompson, Ernst Fischer, and Leo Huberman. This Introduction does fail to do justice on some scores. For example, the treatment of abstract labour (Volume 1, Chapter 2) calling it an 'unnatural' category (as opposed to the natural category of concrete labour), which is *only* a quantitative measure that leaves out the specificity of concrete labour. So an hour of tailoring means one hour of abstract labour and two hours of weaving is two hours abstract labour. 'Labour is a feature weaving and tailoring have in common and this is measured in units of time'. (Volume 1, p. 56) This formulation is incorrect. The law of value as developed by Marx is historically specific to capitalist production. Abstract or value creating labour—a homogeneous measure of quantitative worth—reflects the social content of concrete individual labour, which is the underlying capitalist social relation.

The treatment of money, too, fails to capture the essence of Marx's analyses of a monetary theory of production, with money being the first form in which capital appears—the starting point from which we are taken to the 'hidden abode' of production where the roots of exploitation lie in the sale and purchase of labour power. It is these simplifications that lead to the rather misleading conclusion that the future 'New Society' should be one that abolishes all sales and money!

In fact, coming as it does from the person responsible for the Indian edition of Bettleheim's Third Volume of *Class Struggle in the USSR*, one can't help feeling disappointed at the simplistic picture of the New Society that Ranganayakamma draws. She projects the New Society quite uncritically, without reference to actual experiences of building socialism. One of the most compelling critiques of Marxism in the popular consciousness today has been the failure of socialism where it was attempted. Since none of the problems and questions faced in the course of the attempts to build socialism in the former socialist bloc are addressed, this picture of the New Society remains most unconvincing.

In sum, while these volumes might serve as a useful tool to explain Marx's political economy to the already converted left activist, as an attempt to popularise Marx they are unlikely to attract fresh supporters.

P.G.D.A.V. College RAMAA VASUDEVAN
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RAJENDRA SINGH, ed., *Grammar, language and society: Contemporary Indian contributions*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997. 366 pp. Tables, figures, notes, references, indexes. Rs. 495

AND

LACHMAN M. KHUBCHANDANI, *Revisualizing boundaries: A plurilingual ethos* (Language and development-3). New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997. 255 pp. Tables, figures, notes, references, indexes. Rs. 335 (hardback)

Grammar, Language and Society is a well thought out title, as it brings together works from mutually opposing groups. The book starts with an introduction by the editor, followed by fifteen articles organised into three sections. Section I, titled 'Grammar', contains four articles, two on phonology and one each on morphology and syntax. The papers in this section represent the small but dominant group which views language essentially as an abstract entity, the study of which does not require any reference to society. Section III, 'Language and society' forms a less cohesive group as it contains ten articles from the diverse and yet somewhat loosely related areas of change, plurilingualism, stylistics and educational/applied linguistics. This section represents a large but marginalised group which views language as embedded in its social context. Section II, 'Grammar and language', contains a single important article, and tries to bridge the gap between Sections I and III. It can be said to represent a tiny minority which realises the urgency of bringing together the dominant and the marginalised in a fruitful manner so that linguistics can grow as a more responsible science without compromising its interest in grammar.

The volume presents no new research. All the articles except one have been published earlier. The volume also contains as many as three articles written by the editor himself, one individually and two with co-authors. Though the reasons for their inclusion are understandable, this could have been avoided.

The first article is one of the pioneering works on the theory of lexical phonology. The key points of the theory are the innovation in the morphology-phonology interface, internal modularisation of grammar, and a distinction between lexical and post-lexical rules. The second article on a no-rule approach to phonology by Singh claims that the phonological alternations can be dealt with by WFCs. However, Singh's conclusions regarding 'controversial' alternations are less convincing and have to be treated with caution. Article three provides support in favour of a word based theory of morphology (IL type) by

testing it against data from inter-morphology. Article four provides evidence from Malayalam in support of a lexical framework for syntax.

The sole article in Section II by Das Gupta is the first serious attempt from within the dominant paradigm of generative linguistics to understand how external evidence from areas such as acquisition, borrowing, change and damage may usefully be brought to bear on the hypothesis of 'core' linguistics. The article offers no quick-fix solutions, but initiates a dialogue in the right direction.

Section III contains ten very important articles, which can be divided into four sub-sections. Articles six and seven refer to change. While Krishnamurty provides quantitative evidence from Dravidian in support of the lexical diffusion hypothesis, Nadkarni examines change in the relative clause structure of Konkani in the context of the Konkani-Kannada contact situation. Krishnamurty's study, though seminal, is marked by his over-reliance on Sapir's 'drift', and his contention that the change initiated in proto-Dravidian is still in progress needs to be debated in the light of the last two decades' research findings in the area of variation and change. Articles eight through twelve deal with plurilingualism. Pundit's insightful remarks on bilingualism and variation are still valid, and in line with recent research in the area of variation and change. Article nine is a classic work in which Srivastava successfully explodes the myths that prevailed in the minds of the western scholars pertaining to the effects of bilingualism. Article ten is an interesting critique of studies on discourse strategies employed in inter-ethnic communications involving native and non-native speakers. Articles eleven and twelve quite realistically problematise the issue of linguistic diversity prevailing in India, and discuss the implications of imparting education through vernaculars vis-à-vis a few dominant standard varieties. Kelkar provides a thought provoking discussion on encountering a poem. Articles fourteen and fifteen are on second language acquisition and belong to educational linguistics, though often loosely referred to as applied linguistics. While Agnihotri and Khanna emphasise the role of non-psychological factors in second language learning, Prabhu argues that acquisition results from the efforts one makes to comprehend the input.

The four articles in Section I no doubt constitute significant contributions to linguistics, but have been carried out within their respective dominant paradigms, and in this sense reflect continuation and further development of the ideas of their contemporaries and predecessors. The post-modernist overtones as articulated by the editor at places in the introduction to the book are not borne out by these articles. Similarly, the discussion on Labov is confined to Section I (article two), which may be because of Labov's focus on structure. However, Singh's comments on Labov in his introductory remarks on Section III (p. 16) are clearly misplaced and not supported by the articles in Section III. On the contrary, both Pundit (p. 215) and Krishnamurty (p. 170) echo Labov's position. On the whole, the aims and objectives of the book appear to have been overstated.

Nevertheless, the book deserves to be read by all, as it brings together some of the most important contributions to linguistics, and places them in a slightly different perspective influenced by post-modernism on the one hand, and an ambivalent position with regard to the internal and external realities of language on the other.

Many of the concerns articulated in Section III of Singh's volume find exclusive attention in *Revisualising boundaries* by Khubchandani. The book discusses the problematic of language in a plurilingual set up such as India. This has a direct bearing on the methodology, assumptions, and the results of the generative paradigm which still treats language as monolithic. It provides another reason why linguistics should review itself in the context of social reality.

The book addresses a number of pertinent issues: when does L_a ceases to be L_a and becomes L_b, the validity of language identity as a criteria for defining membership in an exclusive group, the politics of language and the fall out of language policies as reflected in language conflicts, induced language change, education, standardisation, and so on.

The issues addressed in the book go far beyond linguistics in terms of their relevance, and should interest sociologists, political scientists, policy makers and educationists as well.

Assam University, Silchar SHOBHA SATYANATH

ANANTA KUMAR GIRI, *Pathaprantara Nrutatva* (in Oriya). (Anthropology of a wayside), 200 pp. Notes, Hardback publication, date not mentioned.

In this collection of seven essays, Ananta Giri draws attention to various socio-cultural problems that are being taken up frequently by several social movements. He illuminates some of the nuances of human lives in accordance with the fancy and thought of other writers.

In the opening essays, Giri calls into question the general impression glorifying America as the land of prosperity and plenitude from the perspective of social anthropology. He takes up here the problem of 'homelessness' engendered by 'de-industrialisation' and 'gentrification' in America. The next chapter focuses on religious movements in America led by the right and the left-wing. It highlights the fundamentalism of the former that opposes secular humanism, and the dynamism and progressive approach of the latter. In chapter three, the author reviews some theoretical and methodological questions regarding Tocqueville's book on democracy. He endeavours to show how Tocqueville has been successful in presenting a critical ethnography of democratic reality in America. The role of social movements in transforming the body, mind and individual has been brought to light in chapter four. In chapter five, Giri highlights women's distinctive experience of time and space which, with some qualifications, seems to offer more promise than the experiences of men for the study of society and culture. Next, the author delineates the complex relation between 'socialism' and 'social

inequality' and gives an alternative definition of 'social equality' seeking its fruition. Finally, the author focuses on literary renewal taking into account both its 'self-identity' and 'dreams' as well as the 'promise' and the 'reality'.

This book is a fine piece of sociological writing in the Oriya language.

Jawaharlal Nehru University DEBASIS GIRI
New Delhi

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Asian Journal of Political Science, Volume 9, No. 1

In this book, the author offers fresh insights and analytical tools to examine a much-contested subject—the nation-state.

The Telegraph, 13 April 2001

With its strong analytical and theoretical bases, this book will be of immense use to sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and those in the field of cultural studies and the study of social systems.

The Financial Express, 12 November 2000

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